

Why the Caged Bird Sings: Radical Inclusivity, Sonic Survivance and the Collective Ownership of Freedom Songs

by

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Abstract

This thesis, by way of deep reflection and truthful recounting, pays homage to six different groups of predominately Indigenous incarcerated women and detained male youth, who engaged with me in an active process of collective songwriting and recording between 2008 and 2015. This inclusive creative process was designed to enable participants—who are at risk of having their voices, histories and identities erased—to participate in a life-affirming demonstration of their own self-expression by co-creating a song together. Indigenous Inquiry or Critical Indigenous Pedagogy (CIP) was the methodology utilized, in order to examine my motivations for wanting to discover and share what constitutes a ‘freedom song’. In doing so, this thesis shares specific knowledge I gained as a result of my lifelong dedication to furthering the dissemination of nêhiyawin (Cree Worldview), through my favourite mode of creative expression: songwriting. In addition to this written thesis, the original songs are included.

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Dedication

In memory of Margaret Sewap

kitâpwan nitôtêm!

(You are right, my friend)

It was me who grew up!

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Introduction

Prologue: awîna kiya? niya ôma...

“I come from a family that knows how to make a short story long,” is how I frequently introduce myself. This is usually a good and friendly opener and makes people laugh. “Cheryl L’Hirondelle niysayihkason. apihtawi-kosisan – nêhiyaw iskwêw êkwa mistik-osiw iyiniw niya ôma. Alberta, Papaschase êkwa Kikino mîna amisk waciyi-waskahikan ohci niya, mâka Toronto mêkwac niwêkan”¹ will be next. Then I’d most likely say: “Oh, and that was a long-winded way of telling you I’m a ‘halfbreed’.” This usually elicits another laugh; unless of course you’re a nêhiyawêwin or Cree language speaker, in which case you’ll know what I am inferring.

To be a ‘halfbreed’ is in some ways akin to owning oneself. Why? Metis visionary Maria Campbell² first taught me the term ‘ka-atapimisohcik’, or ‘they own themselves’ when, many years ago I was struggling to understand who I was and why I felt so out of place in my urban surroundings. The terms refer to the fact that when the treaties were being

¹ Translation: I am named Cheryl L’Hirondelle. I am Metis – a Cree woman and a European. Alberta, namely the Papaschase First Nation, the Kikino Metis Settlement, and the Beaver Hills Lodge are where I am from, but I currently reside in Toronto. NOTE: by mentioning Papaschase, I am also inferring that I am a non-status treaty Indian in addition to being Metis; and in saying ‘from’ I am referring to a sense of ancestral-land connection.

² Maria has done so many things in her life, it is difficult to give her only one descriptor. She has been a mother, a filmmaker, a writer, a storyteller, a healer, an activist – to name but a few of her achievements.

signed, the Metis were not included—unlike their Indian relatives who were being sequestered on iskonikan askiy or leftover strips of land³. Since the Metis had no Indian Agents starving them, they were ‘free’ and ‘they owned themselves’. I will explain more on the significance of ‘freedom’ later in the body of my report, as it relates to the title of my inclusive design project.

As a practicing interdisciplinary artist and singer/songwriter, I have had little formal training, having studied music for a few years privately and attended one year of foundational art college training before being expelled. I learned mostly by doing or by example, both I would later learn are important experiential approaches used within Indigenous pedagogical paradigms. As Ida Swan points out: “Through observation, participation, experience and practice children learned the skills, beliefs, values and norms of their culture, including the understanding that other life processes in the natural world were essential to their survival.”⁴ In my own experience, the urban context was essential to my survival as a contemporary artist in that this situated-ness in a city environment enabled me to develop innovative and original ways of presenting my ideas and myself.

³ The phrase ‘left-over strip’ refers to the fact that previous annual lands that were traversed throughout the seasons for hunting, gathering, wintering and ceremonies were taken away, usually parceled out to settlers; and only a ‘strip’ of that original land was allocated to the current day reserves.

⁴ Ida Swan, “Modeling: An Aboriginal Approach” in *As We See... Aboriginal Pedagogy*, ed. Lenore A. Stiffarm (Saskatoon: University Extension Press, 1998), 49.

Initially, I collaborated with whomever would invite me along and with their other assembled colleagues and friends. Although these first projects cohered exclusively around whoever the central artist or songwriter was, they usually required many be involved, despite the fact that one name was usually predominant on the poster, invitation or the marquee. For some projects we struck up ad hoc collectives or decided on collaborative models. These projects became my schooling, this community of artists my cohort, and regardless of the credit or reward, it was enough to somehow be contributing, expressing myself creatively and learning all the while.

Elders delivered my next round of informal education of learning-by-doing when I worked as a co-storyteller-in-residence⁵ for nine First Nations. These years have been dubbed by several colleagues as my ‘Bush Masters Degree.’ During the course of that intensive study—in addition to learning much about Cree and Dene worldviews—I also was enabled to understand, articulate and bring together the concerns of Elders, community members and school staff to conceive, design and implement various cultural projects for the benefit of youth and generations still to come. These projects

⁵ With singer/songwriter, storyteller and actor Joseph Naytowhow for the Meadow Lake Tribal Council in Northwest Saskatchewan.

were not solitary creation projects either. In addition to my ongoing dialogical collaboration with co-storyteller Joseph Naytowhow, I was fortunate to have the generous guidance of many Elders and the constant feedback and input of community members.

Collectively, over the 35 years, which my multi- and inter-disciplinary artistic practice has spanned, and during these past two years at OCADU, many Elders and teachers along the way have contributed to the ‘invitation of inclusion’, which is how I hope this writing will be read and understood. If there is something in these pages that any reader can riff on, extrapolate, build upon or use for personal expression, then please join in, play along and then pay-it-forward, “for healing of Mother Earth and all her beings”.⁶

In conceptualizing how I would lay out and present this report, I imagined a variety of structures. I am naturally and deeply inspired by many of my respected Indigenous contemporaries—learned scholars, academics and visionary colleagues all—whose work is so articulate and meticulously presented. This work upholds their deep roots and cultural connections in every idea, despite using this still colonizing language. In addition, the work of many non-native allies—visionaries, thinkers, makers

⁶ Maliseet visual artist, activist, medicine woman Shirley Bear once said to me in 1993: “Whatever you do, do it for the healing of Mother Earth and all her beings.” I have never forgotten this teaching Shirley – hay hay!

and doers—equally move me. Their work, writings, and ongoing demonstrations of inclusion and equity offer hope and insight.

I consulted the OCADU Open Guidelines, as I was aware in the course of this research that the work produced would need to represent my own authentic voice: as a medium and as a means of articulating my authority in discussing the subject matter, in an effective declaration of the originality of the approach taken, based as it is on my own perceptive and creative needs. Curiously, these guidelines only state the broad outline and specifics of what must be submitted and leave the issue of the preferred format for the body of the text open to interpretation and preference. I decided to take this open-endedness of format as a symbol and cue for the representation of own my body as a parallel body to this research. So, in keeping with the tenets of Inclusive Design and the ethos of my own choice of MRP subject and investigative style, I chose to offer an alternative, holistic, inclusive and life-affirming layout and design.

As is appropriate to the subject of this study, some explanations are periodically inserted as ‘Indigenous Interventions’ rather than as more standard ‘academic’ commentary.⁷

⁷ As stated in my abstract, I am using Critical Indigenous Pedagogy or Indigenous Inquiry as my critical methodology that has criteria including “It must be ethical, performative, healing,

Background: Sisterly Synergies

In 1999, I had the opportunity to perform and share a few songs and stories with the inmates at Pine Grove Female Correctional Centre in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan⁸. At that particular event, I distinctly remember that two inmates seated in the front row did not seem happy about being at the concert (nor about being in prison, I suspect). I needed somehow to acknowledge the presence of these two women and to keep everyone engaged, or I sensed that there might be a disruption. The guards and program staff were standing at the back and the sides of the room and were monitoring the gathering closely. I had the distinct feeling that, if there was any sign of trouble, the whole concert would be cancelled immediately, and everyone sent back to their units. This would be unfortunate for all of us as the inmates rarely if ever had the chance to attend concert-style public assemblies, and as I had travelled over treacherous rural winter roads to be there.

transformative, decolonizing, and participatory. It must be committed to dialogue, community, self-determination, and cultural autonomy. It must meet people's perceived needs. It must resist efforts to confine inquiry to a single paradigm or interpretive strategy. It must be unruly, disruptive, critical, and dedicated to the goals of justice and equity." Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, "Introduction: Critical Methodologies and Indigenous Inquiry" in *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies*, Norman K. Denzin, Yvonna S. Lincoln, and Linda Tuhiwai Smith eds. (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2008), 2.

⁸ Between 1995 and 2001 Joseph Naytowhow and I also toured and performed extensively in a singing/storytelling duo named Nikamok. During those years we also visited correctional institutions and detention centres in Yukon Territories and in Saskatchewan.

I quickly decided to take a playful approach: to try and coax the women into learning a powwow version of the popular children's song '*Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star*'. I asked, "Who here wants to sing a powwow song with me?"⁹ All of a sudden in the middle row, a younger inmate shouted out and asked excitedly: "are we going to sing the *Strong Woman Song*?" I asked her how she knew the song, and she told me her mom had been an inmate at 'P4W'.¹⁰ I invited her to tell the story of the song—which is part of an Indigenous protocol in both naming the author and explaining the lineage and context in terms of how one came to know and is authorized to impart this knowledge—but she stated that since I was on stage, I should tell it.

Here is the story, approximately as I have told it hundreds of times. I first heard it from Jamais Pacquette, an Anishnaabe woman with whom I used to sing in Toronto as part of Anishnaabe Quek Singers:

"This story takes place at the time sometime in the mid 1980's when there were ongoing riots by inmates at P4W when a sisterhood of native inmates had just finished singing at their big drum in the common area. The drum keeper had stowed the drum when the women who were still all together heard the distinct sound of a prison lock-down. At

⁹ 'Singing powwow' or 'Indian singing' are both commonly used misnomers to refer to singing songs that have chanting or vocables such as 'heyya, heyya', etc.

¹⁰ P4W is the acronym for the infamous Kingston Prison For Women, which closed in 2000 due to media leaks drawing attention to the ongoing dehumanizing conditions there, which had led to riots and further atrocities being carried out on the inmates by guards.

the time of day it happened, it could only mean one thing – a riot. Then came the undeniable sound of sirens and the footsteps of riot squad guards moving towards them. The women were nervous and knew that once they were reached any one of them could be blinded by pepper spray, dragged away, strip searched, confined to ICU (solitary), beaten or worse. One of the women instinctively took her drum beater or drum stick and began tapping the distinctive rhythm of the last song they'd sung at their drum, an east coast round dance song gifted to them by Maggie Paul, a Mi'kmaq/Passamaquoddy singer from New Brunswick. Each one quickly found a nearby surface to beat out the rhythm on and in unison they all began to sing. The most amazing thing then happened. It is said that for the entire riot not one of those women were taken and the entire group was allowed to stay together in the common area until it was over. It is also said that none of the womens' eyes were affected by the pepper spray. This is the power of women's voices singing together in a life affirming manner! Not long afterwards, word got back to Maggie Paul and many other women singers and song keepers who, from time to time, visited the P4W women. From that moment on the song changed from being known as Maggie Paul's round dance song to the Strong Woman Song."

After the story was finished, the room was completely quiet and still. We were all breathing, we were all very present and I sensed that, in that moment, we were unified! I quickly continued and asked if everyone would like to sing '*the Strong Woman Song*' with me, and everyone enthusiastically agreed. Even the two who I thought might have been conspiring to disrupt the event mere minutes before, were now singing and grinning from ear to ear. And the guards and program staff were all singing along too.

This concert became a pivotal moment for me for several reasons: firstly because I realised that by speaking of and telling the story of '*the Strong Woman Song*' – which is an uplifting recounting of an overcoming of adversity—I was given the honour of telling a bit of a local history not necessarily my own.¹¹ This was important because it indicated that a level of trust and respect had been achieved through my willingness to visit and become part of the sisterhood. Secondly, though I was performing with a handsome local Cree man on stage, the women chose to respond and engage mainly, indeed almost exclusively, with me.

Upon reflection, this direct engagement with me as the woman on stage correlated to Cree terms of kinship, where the strength of sisters, maternal aunties and female relatives working together, forms a tight-knit and loving bond. Because of my instinctive impulse to improvise, paying attention to my attuned sense of the women there and their inter-personal dynamics, and because I chose to engage in an inclusive-and-participatory action with everyone—instead of sticking to a set-list the event became a collaboration, the women in the

¹¹ Mary Lee hints at this phenomenon of being respected even if one is a stranger, so that “we must honour the basic rights of all others.” Mary Lee, “Cree (Nehiyawak) Teaching” in *Four Directions Teachings*, compiled by Jennifer Wemigwans (2006).
<http://fourdirectionsteachings.com/transcripts/cree.html>

audience became the shared ‘owners’ of that event. Finally and most profoundly, in this moment (or the series of moments making up this pivotal event) I experienced the feeling of empowerment of having one’s own song. Singing together that day changed me, and left an indelible mark or ‘hook’¹² connecting me to the lifelong song, which I am.

From that day forward, and in every workshop since, multiple questions have presented themselves. Was the empowerment I personally experienced at the Pine Grove concert evidence that our gift economy can still exist? Did I experience a new ceremonial society in this unique familial grouping of incarcerated women—this sisterhood? If so, how can we, as members of that sisterhood assert ownership and merit a constant platform for expressing our voices, substantiated by the innate importance of having our own societal/family songs? Or, rather, was the power of this event based on the suggestion of empowerment that a positive, life-affirming story, or a victory song, can invoke, when the act of singing seems to affirm our existence and to announce: “We are here, we are still here”? Or, perhaps the impact was purely sonic and vibrational, in which case an additional question emerges: how do sound, rhythm & melody resonate and affect us on a base level—when we

¹² “...the part of the song that grabs the listener’s attention and tends to remain in the mind after the song is over.” Sheila Davis, *The Craft of Lyric Writing* (Cincinnati: Writer’s Digest Books, 1985), 31.

embody sound and vibration- or, how does sound become our motivator, the medium of our power song?

Of course, elements of all these factors come into play, along with additional factors that emerge over time when the tenets of 'song as voice' are applied. For instance, on a more practical level, we could also ask: what are the factors needed to create a scenario to facilitate a safe-space where we can open ourselves up to listen and feel? How do we inspire collaboration—to truly include everyone and in doing so to create a unique and new song that irrefutably resonates with and belongs to everyone? Finally, this consideration of factors leads me to ask whether, and how, the power of shared song can remind us that to truly open oneself and experience self-expression is akin to knowing freedom?

Participant Profile: kahkiyaw niwâhkômakanak (All My Relations)

“Today, Aboriginal people account for 4.3% of the total Canadian population: a rise from the 3.8% recorded in the 2006 Census.”¹³ Additional statistics obtained from the government of Canada’s

¹³ Howard Sapers, “Annual Report of the Office of the Correctional Investigator 2012 – 2013” in *Office of the Correctional Investigator* (Ottawa: Government of Canada, 2013), 35.

Correctional Service Canada web portal calculate that Canadian prisons, correctional institutions and detentions centres had a national average of a 33.3% Indigenous population.¹⁴ Factors cited as impacting on this over-representation of Indigenous people are cited, including:

- Effects of the Residential school system;
- Experience in the child welfare or adoption system;
- Effects of the dislocation and dispossession of Aboriginal peoples;
- Family or community history of suicide, substance abuse and/or victimization;
- Loss of, or struggle with, cultural/spiritual identity;
- Level or lack of formal education;
- Poverty and poor living conditions;
- Exposure to/membership in, Aboriginal street gangs.¹⁵

In some provinces and territories, the percentage is drastically raised, most notably in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Yukon and the Northwest Territories.¹⁶ The original research conducted with the federal prison, provincial correctional institution and detention centre for this Masters project were all located in the province of Saskatchewan; I estimated an Indigenous population of approximately

¹⁴ This percentage was based on 2000 statistics. Correctional Service Canada/Working with Offenders/Aboriginal Corrections/Facts and Figures:
<http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/aboriginal/002003-1000-eng.shtml> (viewed April 17, 2015)

¹⁵ Sapers, Annual Report, 19.

¹⁶ Mia Dauvergne, "Adult correctional statistics in Canada, 2010/2011," from *Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2011), 12.

95% in this province, based on what I had witnessed, and further informed by conversations with program staff.

In order to be clear about the original contributions to knowledge which this Masters project seeks to establish, it is also important to say what the project does not do. Neither my MRP nor this report attempts to analyze, historicize or denounce these statistics, or to dwell on my estimates. However much I hoped that my workshops as interventions might be seen to provide a solution to recidivism for participants, of course it is not possible to prove any such direct outcome. Nor does this report attempt to argue for the abolition of prisons, or to discredit any staff, or vindicate any of the participants.

My MRP was most certainly not designed as a 'prison idol search' looking for unknown musical talent to be exploited. Nor did my application of the notion of 'collective ownership' in the title imply any critique of music publishing or of the entertainment industry, though I do make passing references in the report to some instances in which the paradigm of the entertainment industry has failed. The MRP is not conceived as a music therapy or music care project on therapeutic art practices, though the findings may be of use in further research in that field.

Rather, this MRP and report attempt to provide a reflexive account of the potential and impact of an Indigenous 'action-research' style of intervention with an important and under-acknowledged population. The project seeks to set out some of the positive creative outcomes of this intervention by pointing to processes that had positive impact, and to elaborate my unique process of collaborative songwriting and recording in the context of discussion of my aim, which is to provide evidence that this creative process can encourage and engender a sense of self-fulfillment for participants, myself included. I therefore provide anecdotes which are intended to contextualize my analysis of the intervention's success, whilst also discussing, albeit briefly, the inevitable limitations of the research, and outlining a set of future research opportunities building upon this foundational work.

Indigenous Intervention #1: Truth & Life Affirming Ceremonies

As Vine Deloria Jr. insightfully proclaimed that “...many powers are available through the ceremonies and rituals of the tribes and that the powers can be applied to our daily lives to enrich our well-being and enhance our understanding of life in the physical world.”¹⁷ Ceremony is the place of leaps of faith, where unless you are adept, one action may not logically follow the other. Truly, such is life too – we learn about cause and effect by doing, by living.

Pimâtisiwin (life) and tâpwêwin (truth) are the basis of nêhiyawin (Cree worldview) where one must also inevitably ‘suffer’ to ‘earn’ their right to do, have, and become. Ceremony is the place of dense smoke, smudge and long prayers to every direction. The undeniable darkness and melting heat of the sweatlodge, and the mindfulness of being with a clean mind and an open heart challenges us all to pledge to make our actions in honour of life. And as we endure and pray—life does result. When the ceremony ends and we all feast together, we smile knowing we earned the right to another moment of clarity, hope, healing etc. Creative endeavours are similar in that one has to be

¹⁷ Vine Deloria Jr., *The World We Used to Live In: Remembering the Powers of the Medicine Men* (Golden: Fulcrum Publishing, 2006), 214.

thoroughly present, focused and truthful to create something original and meaningful.

This is how positive, life-affirming themes of every song informed and thus became the meta-narrative of and foundation for the ‘Why The Caged Bird Sings’ project. Ever since that day at Pine Grove in 1999, I’ve pondered and prayed, reflecting on the medicine that first concert offered. To be ‘positive’ is not to downplay or trivialize the singular or collective life experiences of any of the participants, myself included.¹⁸ However, if for instance, our truth is sorrow, then sorrow will be our reality—our life. Yet native people are generally known for our humour, and also for our candour.¹⁹ For this reason, in guiding the process of song making, I purposefully shifted the lyrical content away retracing ‘vicious cycles’ in favour of ‘virtuous loops’²⁰. And this is why I began each workshop with the following joke: (Question) *“What happens when you sing a country song backwards?”* (Answer) *“You get back your house, your dog, your car, your husband or wife.”*

¹⁸ As my mom would always instruct: “if you can’t say something nice, don’t say anything at all.”

¹⁹ And my mom would also say: “laughter is the best medicine.” I realize increasingly how much of my artistic practice always circles back to my mom’s teachings, idioms, humour—and my dad’s inventiveness.

²⁰ Most notably Jutta Treviranus and Sambhavi Chandrashekar introduced the concept of ‘virtuous loops’ to me during my Inclusive Design professor’s lectures. They helped me to name the process in which I had been engaged all along.

This introductory joke is offers a humorous commentary on how we can fall prey, unconsciously, to negative self-fulfilling prophesies. It points out that the entertainment industry uses popular music song forms to trick us into a negative identification, a false state of resonance—turning us all into consumers who self-cannibalize our own happiness and good-life, in favour of catchy tunes and tried-and-true hooks—in an accepted musical paradigm.

Scanning the Horizon Lines: Homage (aka Literature Review)

I've been told at various points in my life that 'I am backwards'. It has also been suggested to me that artists often conduct their research backwards, making the design solution first and then asking questions. Both statements may be true, and both may be positive. This 'backward' directionality could point to an innate knowledge of the parameters of possibility, based on something that may best be referred to as 'working with what you've got'. In the spirit of contrariness, I'll begin, as I have done in the majority my many projects (since at least 2002), by paying homage, in lieu of a more formal literature review.

To pay homage, I must point out that I use an uppercase 'W' in considering WHY I am doing this work, which is most influenced and connected to a body of writing published on the topic of Indigenous cosmology and healing in prisons. This body of work has been inspired by the following three elders and the paths they made, upon which I chose to follow.

As mentioned previously, during my time singing with the Anishnaabe Quek Singers, we were all aware and transformed by the work of the late Arthur (Art) Solomon, an Anishnaabe elder, teacher, healer, prison rights activist and poet. Besides his enormous contribution to changing policy by having Indigenous cultural and healing activities integrated into the CSC facilities' programs department, he also worked intimately with inmates. An example of this is how he facilitated the giving of a big drum to the women at P4W, and worked with notable Indigenous female singers all across the country to make periodic visits to the sisterhood at P4W. The Anishnaabe Quek Singers also visited P4W, and Art also gave our drum group permission to sing with hand drums.²¹ These actions alone help to establish the legacy that my project follows. Although I never met Mr.

²¹ This was during the 1990's and 2000's when women singing with hand drums was generally still seen as 'controversial' in many communities, whether urban, rural or reserve. Art's rationale, as was explained to me, was that since we were all doing work in big cities such as Toronto, and on behalf of our communities, it was important that we should sing songs to remind us who we are and where we're from.

Solomon personally, I consider him responsible for helping me to find my authentic 'native' singing voice!²²

Though I had already named this project, I was originally referencing Maya Angelou's autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, a book I'd read as a teenager.²³ Mr. Solomon's collection of essays and poetry, *Eating Bitterness: A Vision Beyond the Prison Walls*, showed me that I was on the right track in reading this poem, entitled *Opening the Bird Cages*:²⁴

*What I am doing I see as
liberating the birds.*

*Opening the cage doors
and letting them fly where they want.*

*To help the people to do
what they need to do to assert themselves,
to do things of value to themselves.*

*I call it opening the birdcages.
That's what I call it.*

*Once the cages are open,
the birds can fly wherever they want.*

The sky's the absolute limit.

²² By no means do I want to diminish my family's musical legacy. However, I will point out that at our large family gatherings, we never sang with hand drums or rattles and usually it was country and western or fiddle music that was our canon of choice.

²³ In 2011, I started to raise funds from various arts funding agencies in order to undertake this project- long before I decided to make it the focus of my MRP.

²⁴ Arthur Solomon, *Eating Bitterness: A Vision Beyond the Prison Walls*, Poems and Essays of Arthur Solomon (Toronto: NC Press, 1994), 122.

His essays in this book criticize the policies of Correctional Services Canada, and read like manifestos for drastic reform and decolonization beyond the prison walls (as the title suggests). However, this is the work to which he dedicated his life so completely, and for which I am so grateful – ‘hay hay!’²⁵

Another equally important Indigenous prison rights activist to whom I am indebted is teacher, writer, speaker, scholar and elder - the late Dr. Joseph Couture. In *A Metaphoric Mind: Selected Writings of Joseph Couture*, the essays invite the reader “to participate in the struggle of Native peoples ... and to probe with him the restorative process and the meaning of Native healing.”²⁶ He lays out compelling and detailed theoretical and practical guidance on methods to conduct this work, though again, his writing is more directed towards Elders, traditional healers and ôskapêwis,²⁷ and less to those interested in methods for singing and songwriting – as will be discussed in the body of my report. Still, so much of this knowledge acts as an important guiding light for this research; and also illuminates the work thematically, with this insight: “Everybody has a song to

²⁵ Translation: thank you (short informal version)

²⁶ Ruth Couture, “Preface,” in *A Metaphoric Mind: Selected Writings of Joseph Couture* (Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2013), 2. (e-book version)

²⁷ Translation: a ceremonial helper.

sing which is no song at all; it is a process of singing, and when you sing you are where you are.”²⁸ Ahaw!²⁹

A final note of homage must be paid to Maggie Paul, the Passamaquoddy elder, singer and song keeper who brought her east coast round dance song, later named ‘*the Strong Woman Song*’ to the women at P4W.³⁰ This song, and the re-telling of the stories surrounding its singing and renaming - sparked the vision I had in 1999, which led in turn to the undertaking of this research. Her life work in singing the songs of her people is an important precedent for what I will later discuss as a key theory and framing mechanism, as it pertains to the concept of ‘sonic survivance’. Kinanâskomitin!³¹

A Suitable Location (Environmental Scan)

There are many practical examples of singers, songwriters and musicians performing in prisons all over the world. In this section, I provide a concise overview of this work that illustrates how, though

²⁸ Joseph Couture, “Native Studies and the Academy,” in *A Metaphoric Mind: Selected Writings of Joseph Couture* (Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2013), 14. (e-book version)

²⁹ Translation: I agree!

³⁰ I’ve met Maggie various times and have also gifted her with tobacco, so that I can sing ‘the Strong Woman Song’ in public.

³¹ Translation: thank you, I am grateful to you!

in the domain of music, my MRP topic and focus offer a unique research contribution.

Beginning shortly after the first song was co-composed (as discussed above); I became fixated on the Prison and Chain Gang Songs as recorded by archivists from the Smithsonian Museum, including Alan Lomax Jr., who collected songs composed and sung in places such as Parchman Farm, aka the Mississippi State Penitentiary. I must state outright that as I delved more and more into these songs, in nearly every case, it was only possible to identify them by the names of the archivists who travelled around and collected them, or by the names of popular, folk and blues singers who had re-recorded them. In other words, the original singers and composers were not documented: their part in originating the work was largely invisible. There were a few exceptions, such as the songs of Bukka White (*Parchman Farm Blues*) and Johnny Le Moore (*Early in the Mornin'*).³² In addition, a few former inmates, namely Lead Belly and Robert Johnson, went on to enjoy well-known musical careers.³³ Yet overall, this early research and the finding that copyright had in most cases not been bestowed to the composers, helped me to formulate part of the project's special

³² http://northbysouth.kenyon.edu/2002/Music/Pages/chain_gangs.htm (viewed March 2015)

³³ Johnny Cash's only time behind bars was in 'drunk-tanks', but his record label and publicists used it as a reason to expand his popular cachet as a 'bad boy'.

attention to 'Collective Ownership' (discussed in more detail in the Conceptual Framework section, and elsewhere).

With the reference to 'Freedom Songs' in the MRP title (again, to be discussed in more detail later, in context of a few key values/codes of conduct within Cree cosmology), I will admit that I was at first inspired by the similarity I discerned between my own practice, and accounts of the uplifting and motivational nature of these songs and their cultural operation and impact within the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950's and 60's. These songs, like those in which I have been involved, played an important role in uniting identities through consonant and meaningful musical expression. In the case of the Civil Rights songs, many originated as well known congregational church hymns that could be sung en masse. Other songs of the Civil Rights movement were protest songs (usually written by one or two songwriters in support of the movement) that were quickly taught and widely shared.

Other related examples of popular songs that I reflected on and researched, shortly after my initial experience in 1999, include Labour Union and politically motivated folk songs by songwriters such as Pete Seeger and Woody Guthrie. Reading about the political

activities and times in which these songs were written excited me, though I had no interest in planning either a prison revolt or a revolution. That said, folk legend Pete Seeger's ability to give the command of his concerts to his 'audiences' is notable; I have tried to use that as a touchstone for my MRP, by recording the songs in the inmates' own voices. I had considered contacting Mr. Seeger to discuss his influence (as we have friends in common), but sadly he left us during the time of my research and writing. His influence is acknowledged and honoured here.

It is also important to note the influence of composer Pauline Oliveros' and her practice of Deep Listening, which was unknown to me until fairly recently, when I started writing this report. In my conceptual framework for this thesis, I refer to the concept of 'Attuned Sensory Empathy (Deep Listening)', as discussed in her book *Deep Listening: A Composer's Sound Practice*. After careful consideration, I am not certain that we are using these words to describe the same practice or phenomenon: our situated practices and ways of using those words may vary. Nonetheless, there are sections of her writing on this subject that resonate deeply with me. I am grateful to her for her scholarly and artistic practice. As my way of showing that gratitude, I have riffed on the concept of 'deep

listening', from my own point-of-view (and with credit to Oliveros) later in this report.

Hundreds of hours of prison choirs from all around the world (except notably Canada) are available via YouTube, and can also be accessed by typing specific keywords into any online search engine. Most are predominately Christian or military choirs, though I did find one example from Asia, where a couple of dance artists engaged prisoners in lip syncing and dancing in unison to Michael Jackson's song *Thriller*. Some of the choirs from Africa may have been original group-composed compositions, the songs are definitely uplifting, and are driven by lively tempos and drum patterns. However, given the lack of full metadata attached to these video clips, it seemed outside of the scope of my research parameters and I did not conduct any more detailed investigation into the lyric translations and composer credits.

Many recording artists and touring musicians have over the years performed for and visited inmates in prisons. The most famous include Johnny Cash, Merle Haggard, Linda Ronstadt and, more recently, Michael Franti, Linda McRae and Rita Chiarelli. Yet in all these case, no collaborative songwriting or more specifically co-writing of original songs took place. Ms. Chiarelli did star in a documentary film

entitled *Music From The Big House*, where she plays music with inmates serving life sentences. There are scenes in the film with the men singing choruses, as well as call and response refrains, but there is no evidence or suggestion that the process involved any collaborative songwriting.

In the contemporary Canadian context, singer/songwriter Faith Nolan is most widely acknowledged as the performing prison rights advocate. In years past, Indigenous creative icons such as Buffy Sainte Marie and Alanis Obomsawin³⁴ were known to have spent long hours and significant parts of their tours performing for and visiting inmates. I also know a few contemporaries of mine who either have done, or continue to do, creative projects inside prisons, at correctional centres or with ‘at risk’ youth, though none, to the best of my knowledge, engage in my collaborative methods, themes or context.

One recent Canadian recording project does precede my MRP and could be seen to serve as a relevant precursor effort. The project was entitled *Pros and Cons Program*, with one full-length recording to date, entitled *Postcards From the County*. Recorded inside the Pittsburgh

³⁴ Many people only know Alanis as a documentary filmmaker, but she started out a singer/songwriter. I have a signed copy of her album *Bush Lady* (1982).

Institution (a men's facility) near Kingston Ontario, some of the songs on the album were co-written with a group of inmates, and all of the songs are performed and recorded inside the correctional facility. Some of the songs are cover songs; other well-known Canadian indie musicians such as Sarah Harmer and Luther Wright are also featured on various tracks. Though none of the inmates are named on the album, my research into the documentation on the project website and in other press materials surrounding the project show that Ontario-based lead artist/producer Chris Brown had obtained permission to convert the institution's chapel into a recording studio, and taught the participants about production, arrangement, sound recording and engineering, thereby "encouraging professional mentorship of inmates." ³⁵ I did not find it necessary to interview or otherwise make contact with Mr. Brown, though he lives close by, since there is not enough of a connection to my ideas around Cree cosmology and the questions I am asking within my MRP to warrant a diversion into his project in any more detail: that would go beyond the scope of this thesis.

³⁵ <http://prosandconsprogram.com> (viewed January 2015)

Indigenous Intervention #2: the Magic of Metaphor

Nêhiyawêwin (Cree language) is based on both metaphor and metonymy, not only as linguistic devices—rather as part of a holistic web of relationships between the four-bodied-ness of our existence. We are at once mental, spiritual, emotional and physical beings; we are at once one with an infinite matrix of air, fire, water – and our beautiful Mother Earth.

It is important to mention here that the use of metaphor is not a pan-Indian linguistic operator. I use metaphor because of what I know to be tâpwêwin (truth) coming from my own understanding of nêhiyawêwin (cree language). My late friend, Ahasiw Maskegon Iskwew, once elaborated: “Tribal cultures speak and transform these definitions through their reinvention of metaphor and metonymy as history and prophesy, woven into a solid and living present, sung by many voices...”³⁶

I find that metaphor tends to serve my creative processes in its meta-ability to be multi-purpose: for me, it links and advances ideas and themes. I use it as a poetic device; as a process with which to construct the lyrics, melody, arrangement; and as a way to make magic

³⁶ Ahasiw Maskegon Iskwew, “Talk Indian to Me #2,” in *Ghostkeeper – the Work of Ahasiw Maskegon-Iskwew* (Vancouver: Grunt Gallery, 1995), <http://ghostkeeper.gruntarchives.org/publication-mix-magazine-talk-indian-to-me-2.html>

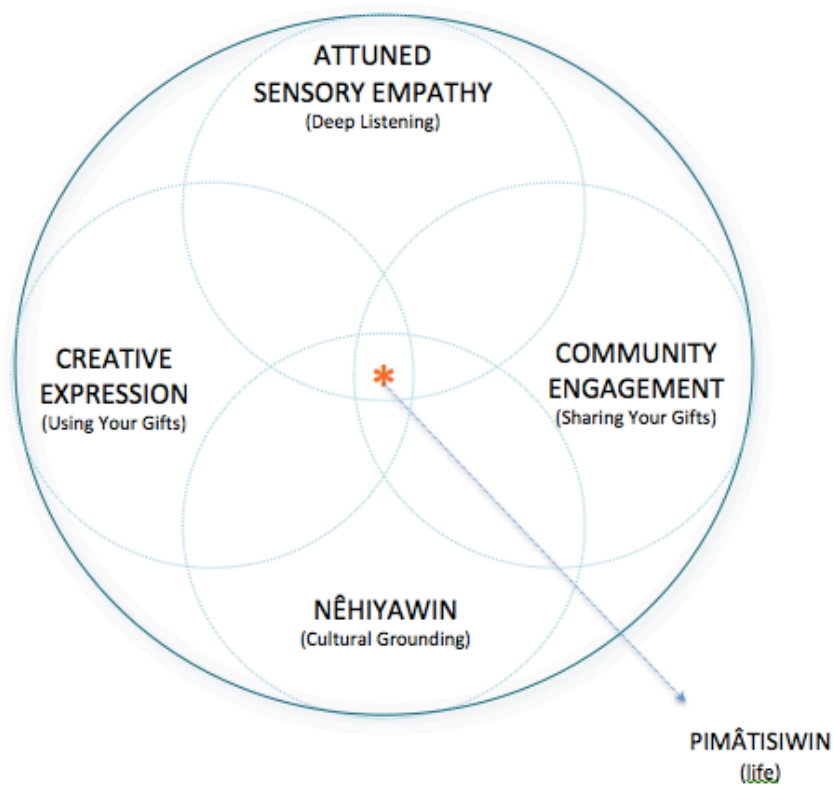
with tangential leaps through strata of conceptual and practical concerns, while always simultaneously invoking home! And when all else fails, metaphor becomes medicine and allows us all to laugh. We give ourselves permission! This last point is vital in an environment where any sense of 'option' has largely been rendered null and void.

Within this charged paradigm shift, the process of song creation, then, is more than a creative act that panders to an entertainment industry, or that is meant as a frivolous distraction. The use of metaphor within this song creation process itself acts like a meta-narrative to anchor the intrinsic symbolism of what we (the participants and myself) undertake by naming each iteration. In doing so, metaphor aligns the song making to other parts of our individual and collective continua. We beckon our ancestors and the spirit world, and we are thus witnessed!

Setting up Camp: The Groundwork

"There was never talk questioning the boundaries between art, community and culture. Everything came bundled together in the same package. Art was considered life; it was holistic, engaging, dynamic and exciting, as it challenged the mind to think, act and be critical, giving us agency in the world."³⁷

³⁷ Maria Hupfield, "Aboriginal Art Practice – from Quillboxes and Kitchens to Totem Poles," in *Access All Areas: Conversations on Engaged Arts* (Vancouver: Grunt Gallery, 2008), 84.



1: *Why The Caged Bird Sings*: the Groundwork

Creative Expression (Using your Gifts)

My main passion and source of creative fulfillment has always been singing and songwriting: this is my essence. I have long used the analogy that “I am a bird on a branch singing out into four directions.” I also come from a large musical family.³⁸ This is the

³⁸ My surname L’Hirondelle is a French word for the bird ‘the swallow’ and one of my spirit names is that of a bird as well.

core and ‘what’ of my major research project, *Why The Caged Birds Sings*, which is artistically grounded. In my first thinking about this section of the thesis, I had considered naming this part ‘having one’s voice heard’, however, Indigenous expression is not strictly based in one discipline, and in any case I also needed to be more inclusive in order to involve possible deaf participants for instance, or alternatively, participants who might only want to share images. Hence I renamed this section ‘Creative Expression (Using your Gifts)’.

Black Elk’s challenge here comes to mind: “a person who has a vision is not able to use the power of it until after [s]he has performed the vision on earth for the people to see [and hear].”³⁹ Around the same time, in a different community-engaged project on which I was working, I had composed several songs that were about the homeless I had witnessed in Vancouver, where I had then visited various of the homeless and sang these songs to them on the streets. One song, entitled ‘*Happy*’, had the lyric: “happy to see you and I’m happy you’re still here / standing where you always seem to find some warm

³⁹ John G. Neihardt (Flaming Rainbow), *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), 208.

air.”⁴⁰ Afterwards, the person I was singing it to would usually exclaim: “that song is about me!”

With my MRP, I wanted to do more—more than sing to, sing with and sing about—I wanted to involve the participants in the making of the song itself, especially since I had a dedicated five days in their good company. Composing lyrics and melodies that wove together and expressed what I was experiencing in the world around me, made me feel more present, grounded and liberated. Creative expression fostered “confidence and self-esteem...linked to the ability... to create something that could be seen, touched, or heard... something [to be] proud of.”⁴¹ Therefore, in sharing the process of composing a song from start to finish, I was able to ‘use’ my gift to immerse the participants in the same process that I use to empower and balance myself—I was using creative expression as the means to a shared and tangible end.

⁴⁰ The ‘warm air’ refers to the grate at street level from a nearby buildings’ ventilation system. This project was entitled *nikamon ohci askiy* (songs because of the land) aka Vancouver Songlines, the first of what has become an internationally iterative sonic mapping project where I ‘sing land’.

⁴¹ Linda Archibald and Jonathan Dewar, “Creative Arts, Culture, and Healing: Building an Evidence Base,” in *Pimatisiwin: A Journal of Aboriginal and Indigenous Community Health* (Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2010), 8.

Community Engagement (Sharing your Gifts)

My more than two decades' long practice of community-engaged projects also importantly establishes the 'who' for and with whom this participatory design event is intended. Many of my Indigenous colleagues understand, as I do, that the importance of utilizing our gifts is in the sharing of them, not only now, but also for seven generations still to come. This is part of how I understand our pre-contact gift economies operated – one shows their wealth by sharing and distributing it. From example, I have also learned that this is how one leads – by serving.⁴² I wanted this report to reflect epiphanies from this significant part of my artistic practice as well.

I consider myself to be (to some degree) an arts activist; it is thus exciting to see how creativity can be moved outside of a solitary and private practice—how it can inform a transformative experience bonding a group of people together to create something for a common good. A large part of my practice has been themed around subversion and intervention. In that sense, I made a choice not to make part of

⁴² In my years working as a co-storyteller in residence for Meadow Lake Tribal Council, I was fortunate to have met several traditional chiefs who, despite the Indian Act and its many man-made laws, still led using the natural laws as their guides. One chief in particular actually led his people by being 'behind' them - literally and figuratively.

my living from performing for this ‘captive audience’—as has already been notoriously accomplished—but rather to be more provocative, using my talents to engage on a deeper, more lasting level. Further, to share the copyright credit and future licensing residuals seemed a very interesting way of creating long-lasting relationships and creating many more future possibilities for all involved.

Arts activist Irwin Ostwindie notes: “Through song, theatre, film, acts of bold madness, and creative expression, working class people, First Nations, and immigrant communities interrupt dominant narratives.”⁴³ By my reckoning, the act of sharing my gift of knowing how to compose a song with any group whose story or voice has been constrained by an oppressive and dominating narrative, is fair play!

Attuned Sensory Empathy (Deep Listening)

The ‘why’ of my choice to undertake this particular design challenge is also a very important part of the ongoing conversations about this inclusive design project – namely: Why is it that I choose to focus in my work on ways to engender empathy? From a personal perspective,

⁴³ Irwin Ostwindie, “Uncomfortable Choices: Inside the World’s Most Liveable City,” in *Access All Areas: Conversations on Engaged Arts* (Vancouver: Grunt Gallery, 2008), 60.

my own learning 'disabilities', cognitive behavioural issues and sensory-conflated inclinations are not only (and indeed not mainly) experienced as 'difficulties' but are rather embraced as important portals to lateral insights. I think these 'different abilities' with which I am gifted help me to do more than just feel sympathetic. They are, additionally, intuitive triggers to lexicons of well-traveled sensory pathways that enable an empathetic communication that comes naturally to me.

This awareness of my own abilities, particularly in the domain of empathy, have helped me make sense of what happened during the 1999 Pine Grove concert, and to envisage what was possible. I've also pondered my role in encouraging empathy as an enthusiastic and caring elder-sister in the creative process, and considered how empathy has tended to inform and operate in the process of my own experience of the (role) modeling of which Ida Swan has spoken: "...the modeling approach remains relevant for teaching skills that are essential for the personal and professional growth.... It creates a sense of connectedness with the physical, mental, psychological and spiritual world...." ⁴⁴ Child Psychologist Gordon Neufeld refers to this idea of

⁴⁴ Ida Swan, Modelling, 49.

modeling as “the hierarchy of caring”⁴⁵ where the actions of an elder sibling, extended family or community member are modeled by others who may be younger, and who tend to perceive empathy and positively modeled behaviours as signs of attachment and loving, which can in turn be extended outwards.

In my creative process, modeling plays an important part in that it is one of the reasons why participants choose to contribute and collaborate—they see me do it so they’re willing to try. In any creative project, I can quickly sense boredom, hesitation, frustration, doubt and anxiety as they may sometimes emerge from the participating group, and I utilize my lateral insights to elicit a positive change and sense of empathy and engagement in the group, to co-produce an original creative response. Pauline Oliveros says the following of her practice of Deep Listening:

“Deep has to do with complexity and boundaries, or edges beyond ordinary or habitual understandings... Deep coupled with Deep Listening for me is learning to expand the perception of sounds to include the whole space/time continuum of sound—encountering the vastness and complexities as much as possible.”⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Gordon Neufeld and Gabor Maté, *The Hierarchy of Caring*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=inv-v5e0cHQ> (viewed June, 2014.)

⁴⁶ Pauline Oliveros, *Deep Listening: A Composer’s Sound Practice* (Lincoln: iUniverse, 2005), xxiii.

The awareness of this in-between-place is how I hear and experience melody and rhythm everywhere and in everything. This locus in my groundwork is where it is impossible not to have an open heart. It is where and how I find the space in my mind to become more and more aware, more insightful, and to fall in love over and over again with every dust particle, blade of grass, gust of wind and being. This area in my groundwork is itself a liminal zone, straddling the realities of using and sharing our gifts within an embedded empathetic practice of deep listening.

Nêhiyawin (Cultural Grounding)

The three subject areas detailed above are complete in and of themselves, and would have provided ample groundwork upon which to lay the foundation for reflection and analysis of my project outcomes. However, so much of my identity, existence, hopes and dreams are inextricably tied to my mother's and those ancestors' worldview and the 'sounding' of that cosmology ⁴⁷. Hence my dedication to the totality of work in terms of past, present and future artistic and academic pursuits, applies to my determination about the continuation

⁴⁷ The 'wê' in nêhiyawêwin literally means 'sounding' - from a conversation with Neal McLeod, 2002.

of nêhiyawin – a Cree worldview –which I see and feel as the nexus of location and connection to source: the ‘where’ of/with (us) all.

The love I was shown by the Elders when I worked in North-western Saskatchewan lives on in me, forever illuminating the path ahead. It is their patience and compassion to teach me who I am, which in turn gives me the desire to pay-it-forward. On a sensory level and as it pertains to my own rigour in my creative practice, tipiyawêwisowin (the teachings related to self sufficiency) are poignant tools to continue to develop and to witness and celebrate in myself, and in the developing work of the participants with whom I choose to co- create (or work). These teachings from the Elders contain codes of personal conduct, designed to enable each of us to make his or her own living. The codes are:

iyinîsiwin: the ability to develop a keen mind;
nahihtamowin: the ability to develop a keen sense of hearing;
nahâsiwin: the ability to develop alert and discerning faculties;
nisitohtamowin: the ability to develop understanding;
kakayiwâtisiwin: the ability to develop an inner sense of
industriousness or inner ability or desire to be hardworking;
atoskêwimahcihowin: the inner desire or need to work;
waskawîwin: the inner energy to move or develop a sense of
personal initiative;
manâtisiwin: the inner capacity of respect; and
kisêwâtisiwin: the capacity to be kind.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Harold Cardinal and Walter Hildebrandt, *Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan: Our Dream Is That Our Peoples Will One Day Be Clearly Recognized As Nations* (Calgary: University Press, 2000), 45.

I must admit truthfully, that when I first began the *Why the Caged Bird Sings* project, I was still analyzing many experiences from a Eurocentric point-of-view. As a 'trained' singer, I was hypothesizing about inherent musicality and perceived tone deafness that I thought I was experiencing. But once I began to understand personal conduct from within nêhiyawin (Cree worldview), I had to re-evaluate what 'a keen sense of hearing' might be in concert with 'developing understanding' and 'an inner capacity of respect'. It is with this knowledge that I identified my own inner motivations to forge ahead and allow this matrix to animate and add dynamism to this current project, and to all that lies ahead.

Indigenous Intervention #3: Looking Within- Home as Insight

You may well ask: What does a tipi have to do with a musical composition? Ultimately it is 'one', the root, the key signature—it is home.⁴⁹ And what of the poles and their values, and the order in which they are added to construct a lodge? What has that do to with a song form? I would say that the form of the tipi is no different from any song form, replete with choruses, refrains, a bridge, verses, intros,

⁴⁹ Contrasting the Nashville numbering system with other music theory, where the root of the key signature is considered one, the dominant key five etc.

outros, instrumental passages and movement between tonal values—so that it all hangs together to make a good song (or structure).

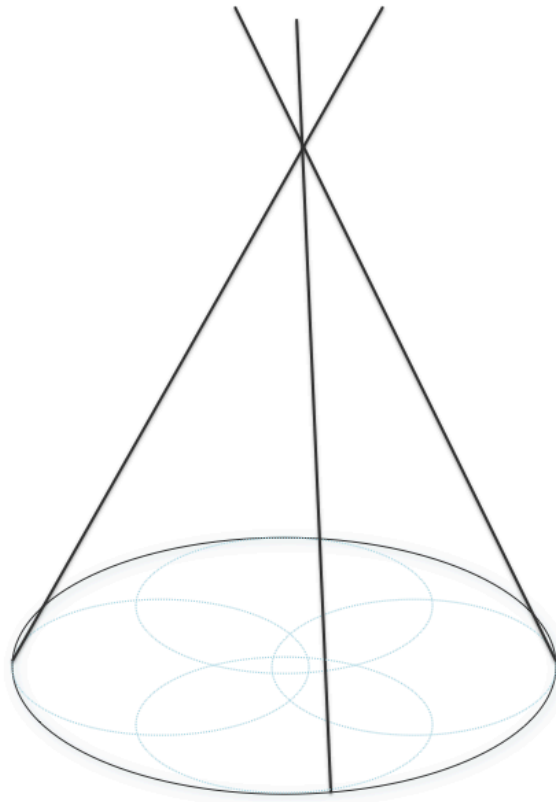


figure 2: The first three poles of mîkiwahp (a tipi) on the groundwork

From the context of the vast scope of the Cree epistemological framework—the mîkiwahp or ‘tipi’, became a meaningful way to envisage my conceptual ideas and to discuss the structure and approach I have chosen to take in my MRP. The more I thought about all of the intended impacts of the project *Why The Caged Bird Sings*, the more I found

myself returning to the originating impulses of the project and relating it to the 15 life-affirming values of the tipi:

nanahihtamowin: Obedience - listening to those who know;
kihçêyihtamowin: Respect - respecting those who know;
tapahtêyimisowin: Humility - interconnectedness - no one is above or below;
(the first 3 poles of building a lodge – all the rest of the ‘values’ or poles build, cross reference and rest upon these)
miywêyihtamowin: Happiness - showing enthusiasm encourages others;
sâkihtowin: Love - for all beings (i.e. in a Cree worldview even rocks are animate);
tâpwêhtamowin: Faith - belief in truth and a spirit world;
wâhkôhtamowin: Kinship - know who you are and where you come from;
kanâcihowin: Cleanliness - of mind, spirit, emotions and body;
nanâskomowin: Gratitude - take nothing for granted
wîcêhtowin: Compassion - sharing what you have;
sôhkâtisiwin: Strength - bravery, courage;
miyo-ohpikihâwasowin: Good child-rearing - raising future generations;
pakosêyimowin: Hope - for a better future;
nâtâmostawin: Protection - always find shelter and good people to be with;
tipêyimisowin: Freedom - balance, own oneself and/or be in self-control.⁵⁰

To be truthful and transparent, I have never helped to raise an actual life-sized tipi in the physical, traditional sense, though I have engaged in the symbolic act of raising tipis many times in cultural

⁵⁰ From my own lyric notes following a song I composed entitled Kîkinaw (2008) by ‘singing’ a tipi.

and creative projects in the past. In 1998, after first learning of the tipi pole teachings from the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, I raised my first metaphorical online lodge. Since then I've used chopsticks, string and fun-tak at my kitchen table; I've drawn countless lodges pole-by-pole on paper and rendered even more versions for word documents and power point presentations. I once imagined a giant tipi transposed above the place now known as Vancouver, and collected materials found at the base of each pole to make an artwork.

Beyond all these conceptual and virtual iterations, there is the actual physical engagement in real time-space. I continue to travel around the world to gather people together in order to help conjure tipis out of handheld spotlights and sage smudge, as a means of creating collective autonomous zones that can assert Indigenous 'survivance', a temporal symbolic multi-sensory graffiti that intones the concept that "We're Still Here!" I've also told stories, sung songs, feasted and fasted in a few tipis along the way, and I've prayed with Elders, visited friends and even 'sing' tipis too!

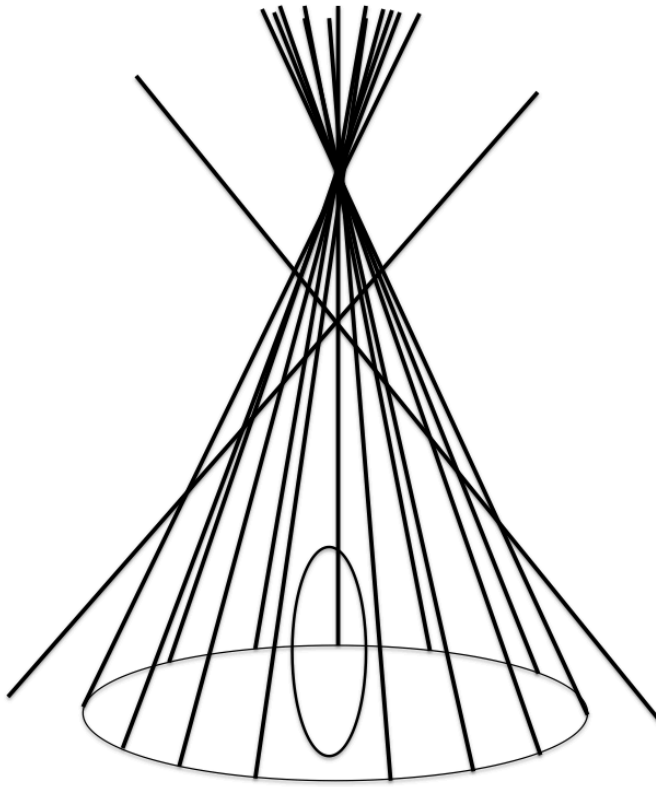


figure 3. The 15 poles of mîkiwahp (a tipi)

The tipi is also one of many lodges where knowledge is held, where transformation is possible. It is a safe space, albeit a temporary refuge. It is also a nomadic structure that suits my project's lack of fixed location. As I began graphically adding the poles of the tipi upon the aforementioned groundwork of my conceptual framework, I couldn't help but notice how the poles (sans tipi covering) resembled a birdcage.

Of course I am in no way am I suggesting a functional or operational similarity between confining prison architectures or animal traps and the structures of our traditional dwellings. The physical resemblance, however, intrigued me and provoked me to consider the ways in which the structure of the life-affirming lodge showed itself to me as a secure place to 'keep-and-protect' our people—past, present and future. This certainly inspired me to reflect on how many teachings, stories and songs we would have learned in our lodges, being in the close proximity of family during long winter seasons.

It is also important to note that for the purposes of this report, all of the locations and a majority of the participants were great northern plains-based, where this structure is familiar.⁵¹ My goal in presenting it here within this MRP report is to illustrate its life-affirming and holistic construction, suggestive of its inherent value system and ability to house a matrix of complex concepts that are dynamic and multi-purposed. It is a unique shape in a landscape now otherwise crowded with squares and rectangles; it offers a variance, a different vibration.

⁵¹ Also known as Canada's prairie provinces. Tipis and other similar Indigenous structures are also found throughout various parts of the U.S. as well as other parts of the world, however, my MRP focuses on the land now known as Canada.

Sun-wise: Motivational Workshop Methods

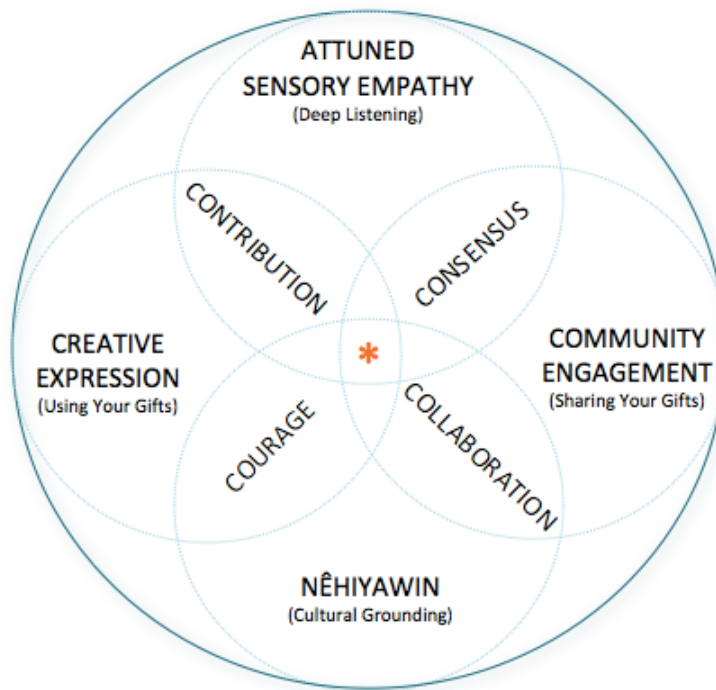


figure 4: *Why the Caged Bird Sings*: Workshop Methods + Groundwork

The methods the five-day singing/songwriting and recording workshop utilizes have been part of my community-engaged artist toolkit, though previously never formalized; yet naturally emerge from the four initial interstices where the original groundwork overlaps. These interstices are equal in size and weight and serendipitously resemble an inner propeller (or could be further abstracted/graphically altered to resemble a sun symbol). This movement represents the roles these four methods—Courage,

Contribution, Consensus and Collaboration—play in propelling each songwriting workshop forward in a sun-wise manner or direction.⁵²

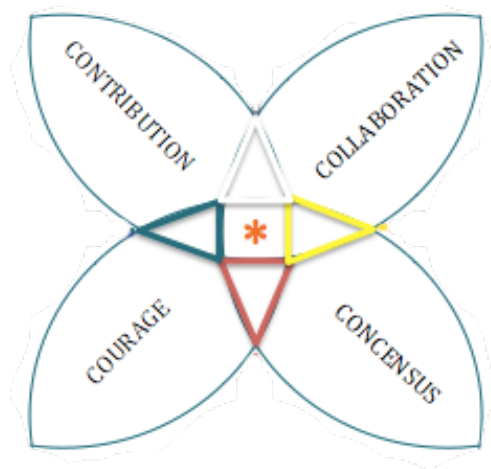


figure 5: *Why the Caged Bird Sings*: Workshop Methods (detail)

As can be seen (in figure 5 above), there is a correlation between the overlapping groundwork previously discussed and the conceptual methods the workshop employs to keep this momentum moving forward. ‘Consensus’, for example, is a natural outcome of Deep Listening and

⁵² The exact use of the term and demonstration of ‘consensus’ was shared by Carla Johnson-Powell, the literacy teacher at Pine Grove Correctional Centre during my very first visit. Though this was the way I conducted much of my community-engaged work – i.e. making room so everyone’s voices and opinions could be heard—it was Carla who named it thus. I am also grateful for and wish to acknowledge her practice of having the women in her classroom engage in daily journal writing. I continue to draw upon this practice, allowing participants to add my exercises to their journals or allowing them to contribute phrases from texts they have already written—and for others who haven’t previously been in the practice of daily writing, to use the workshop as a way to begin.

Sharing Your Gifts, while 'Collaboration' is a likely positive result of the juncture of Community Engagement and Nêhiyawin.

This positive motion begins during the very first round of introductions where I explain the project and share a bit of my own story and then either perform or play recorded songs from previous iterations of the workshop. By setting an example, I demonstrate what is appropriate and fair to share, providing inspiration to the participants so that they can contribute in their own ways.

At the beginning of the workshop, my method is to moderate a circle around the room inviting contributions; inevitably there may be occasional participants who opt out of contributing. However, after many rotations, our collective 'motor' (and sense of industriousness) propels us, allowing boundaries, hesitation, limitation and doubt to be replaced with enthusiasm, dialogue and eagerness to move to the next step of song creation.

The Four Directions: Multimodal Outcomes

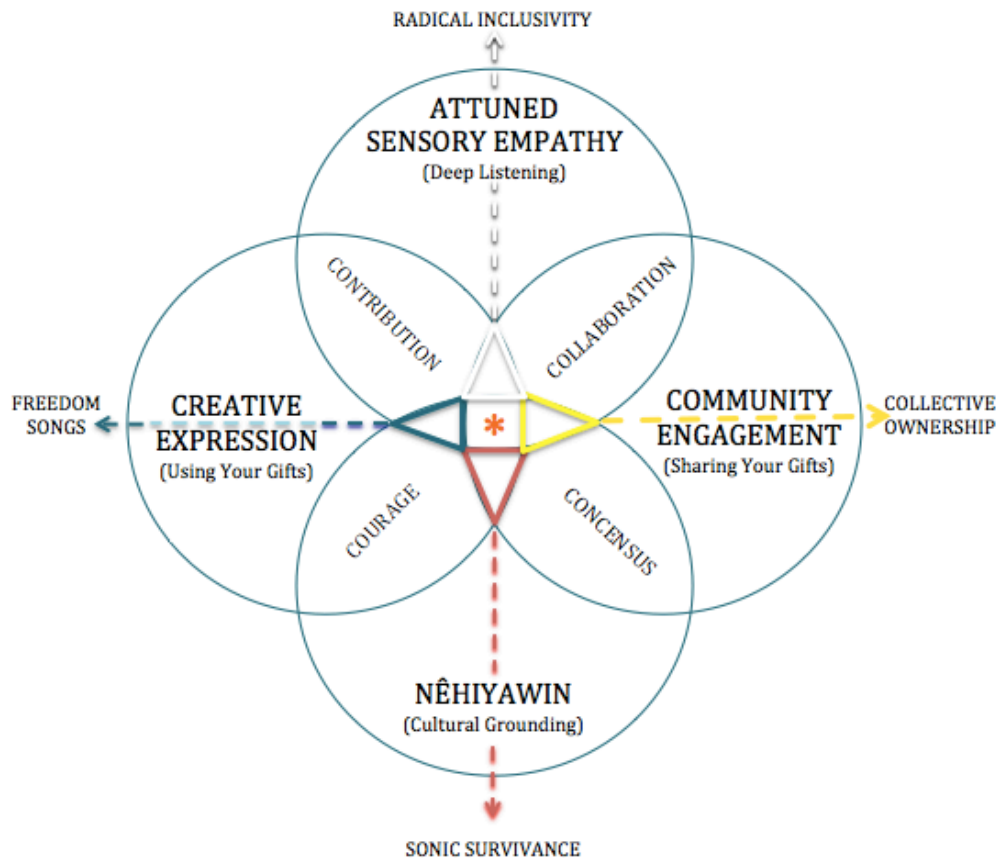


figure 6: Conceptual, Spiritual, Emotional, Physical Workshop Outcomes

As the workshop moves forward day-by-day, dynamic forces are at work. As I continue to return to work with the participants anew each day, I begin to feel and experience their sense of relief and reassurance at my consistent return. At the same time, on a personal level, I am so honoured and pleased that they are willing to engage, return and go

deeper with this work. At some point during day two, I can start to feel them 'owning' what is going on. Critical questions are asked and new ideas are suggested. As Friere notes:

" ... true dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking—thinking which discerns an indivisible solidarity between the world and the people and admits of no dichotomy between them—thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than as a static entity—thinking which does not separate itself from action, but constantly immerses itself in temporality without fear of the risks involved."⁵³

So concepts or project components that I may have presented during the first day of introductions are deliberated further. We debate, sometimes argue, sometimes tease, always laughing, and always happy to get to be together. Open dialogue and hope propels us further in the creation process. Now we're riffing!

Radical Inclusivity

As previously mentioned, my mentor Shirley Bear often counselled me to have good intent in all my activities, "for the healing of Mother

⁵³ Paulo Friere, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2000), 92.

Earth and all her beings.”⁵⁴ A few years later, after I’d moved to northwestern Saskatchewan, I found a new meaning to her counsel. I was learning *nêhiyawêwin* (Cree language) and I learned that there was an inclusive ‘clusive’ linguistic distinction where, because of the animacy of *nêhiyawin* (Cree worldview) the term “*kiyânaw*” (all of us together) includes not only everyone (hence not excluding any people or animals), but also includes all the animate ‘things’ present as well.

This new insight into a more ‘radical inclusivity’ was deepened when I encountered the teachings of Anarchist philosopher and poet Hakim Bey. After I read some of his work on how man-made rules are exclusive, I began to ponder the negative impact of this exclusivity in ensuring the wellbeing of everyone in a camp, for instance. From Bey’s work, I further hypothesized that the role of clowns and contraries in Indigenous worldviews (in their mocking of our socialized ways—i.e. how contraries do not accept gifts, but throw them aside) may be to remind us that man-made laws are always going to be exclusive, because they’re not part of the greater law. Cree Elder Jim Kanapatatoe elucidates this further when he notes how, “the natural laws of nature are those observable, natural phenomenon. They are perfect, prevalent

⁵⁴ Shirley Bear was one of the founders of Minquon Panchayat, an arts movement to include more First Nations artists and artist of colour. I became their national animation coordinator for in 1992/93.

and predictable since they are the Creator's spirit in nature. These are balance, purpose, peace and harmony."⁵⁵

The framework of radical inclusivity relates to workshop setting in a couple of ways. First, it intimates to the inmates that their keepers—the program staff and guards were to some degree, 'caged birds' themselves since they too had to be there day after day, year after year. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, this provocation ensured that no-one was left out or left behind in the workshop—as it was imperative that everyone's voice, writing, drawing and overall contribution must be apparent in the artefact. On another practical level, by ensuring the program staff and any other staff who commit to the entire workshop are included in the equal shares of the song guarantees a constant institutional memory of the song for the benefit of current, re-offending and new inmates alike.

This notion of radical inclusivity manifested itself at another level as well: to write a song in English is also ironically and contentiously to be radically inclusive—since it could be construed that to write lyrics only in one specific Indigenous language could be excluding

⁵⁵ Wally Isbister, "A Piece of the Pie," in *As We See... Aboriginal Pedagogy*, ed. Lenore A. Stiffarm (Saskatoon: University Extension Press, 1998), 79.

others. To extend the thinking, the ‘inclusivity’ of English in terms of sharing the song most widely applied not only within the core group of songwriters and collaborators but also by extension to other inmates at the correctional facility and/or others who might wish to sing the song in the future. To leave that inclusive legacy, it was ironically important to use the widely understood medium of the English language, despite the political connotations of using the ‘colonizer’s tongue’.

Sonic Survivance

“Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy and victimry. Survivance means the right of succession or reversion of an estate, and in that sense, the estate of native survivance... The postindian...waives centuries of translation and dominance, and resumes the ontic significance of native modernity. Postindians are the new storiers of conversions and survivance...”⁵⁶

As with the point made in the previous section about writing using English language lyrics—so here too, the concept of sonic survivance is complex and yet also so simple—like the uninterrupted constancy of a birds’ song that announces: ‘we’re here, we’re still here’. Maggie Paul reminds us: “The music never died. The culture never died. The

⁵⁶ Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), vii – viii.

traditions never died. It was all just waiting for somebody to say 'Hey, this is what we got to do.'"⁵⁷

Originally, I was referring to songwriting as my own 'tools of survival' yet once I learned what 'survivance' meant, that term so clearly articulated much more than variations of the word 'survival' could ever do. 'Survival' sometimes seems to be inextricably rooted in the victimry culture Vizenor mentioned (as in survivors of 'x' abuse, etc.), whereas 'survivance' has more positive and liberating connotations—calling forth the images of the proud flesh that reveals the scar from a wound, used as a site on which to tattoo a sign or a symbol. The 'sonic' element works practically as an example of how good aliteration sounds, and additionally is an important reminder for participants to allow themselves to have their voices recorded singing the song.

Collective Ownership

As mentioned previously, this facet of the project is a response to historic precedent regarding how the copyright of many chain gang songs was only attributed only to the archivists and not the composers. It

⁵⁷ Alexandra Paul, *In Conversation with... Maggie Paul*, Winnipeg Free Press, posted April 2014 <http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/local/in-conversation-with-maggie-paul-254003581.html> (viewed March 2015)

also alludes to much of Pete Seeger's music, where his concerts and music were generously shared with and for the people. I here propose the notion that the legacy and mark these songs may leave could herald an emergent type of ceremonial society emerging—or the reinvigoration of a still vibrant one—as in a warrior society.

On a practical and monetary level, the sharing is more straightforward. I receive an artist fee for conducting the workshop, but when it comes to licensing the songs, the residuals need to be shared with everyone who co-composed the song. The implications for my music publishing company in particular and for industry standards in general could be radical and far-reaching. For instance, I dispensed with the industry standard of the five basic publishing agreements, all of which are more for the benefit of the publisher.⁵⁸ Instead, I only hold back an extremely minor portion of licensing funds to pay for very basic administration costs, then sharing the balance with the collaborators.

The larger project *Why the Caged Bird Sings* has with it a strong sense of collectivity, as previously mentioned. Participants make suggestions as to

⁵⁸ Paul Sanderson, *Music Law Handbook for Canada: 10 Essential Legal Articles* (Woodstock: Seraphim, 2014), 32-35. The author, an entertainment lawyer names and discusses how all five agreements operate including percentages and shares of the copyright.

how to build further upon the basic elements of the project, in order to consider their needs and way of life. Such aspects can include newsletter updates, artwork for album covers, singles versus full album releases. We engage in dialogue over questions such as: who can re-record the song, who can sing the song, who can sell it? Can unofficial bootlegs copies be made? I document how participants want to be identified in print (for album covers, websites and PR purposes) and how I can best credit them verbally (in concert, in conversation or press interviews). We witness each other signing a 'song split' document as further proof that we all did this together—that this song belongs to us all, on our own terms.⁵⁹

Collective ownership is also a paradigm shift away from the old singular model (me-myself-and-I). I can now see and describe this transformation from the singular position of an independent artist who has a community-engaged practice, into a more inter-connected artist who is part of a community. Hence the allusion of the emergence of a new society which brings with it the promise of a life-long relationship—so that the legacy can live on. This recognition of my own transformation through this creative process also reminds me that we all have a life-long

⁵⁹ The exception here is in the case where the warden needs extra time to vet my documents. These documents are then mailed to each participant afterwards, or in the case of youth in detention, where the centre creates their own document on behalf of the underage youth that I sign. I then follow up with a signed certificate for participants that state their achievement and co-ownership. An example of a 'song split' document can be found in the appendix.

responsibility to carry and honour this ‘bundle’, comprised of the project, process, participants and the songs themselves.

Freedom Songs

Sometime during the afternoon of day three or the morning of day four the chaotic cacophony and chatter of the workshop gives way to a steadily emerging consonant confluence of melody and lyrics. At first it startles us and flies out, into, and around the room—and is the room too.⁶⁰ David Byrne suggests: “...music perfectly fits the place where it is heard, sonically and structurally. It is absolutely ideally suited for this situation—the music, a living thing, evolved to fit the available niche.”⁶¹ My task is to introduce the melody, synthesizing the song form that we all agreed upon, combined with the cadence of the lyrics that have been assembled and a key signature—based on the vocal range of the participants—that we have sung, talked and laughed—as we have conspired (breathed) together. This song is the undeniable proof that the caged bird sings songs of freedom!

⁶⁰ Elizabeth Gilbert, “Your Elusive Creative Genius,” in *TED Talks*, http://www.ted.com/talks/elizabeth_gilbert_on_genius (viewed August 2013). The writer presents the idea (based on Greek and Arabic ancient thought), that ‘genius’ is a spirit that lives in the walls of a room and our responsibility as writers is to show up and do the work, so that this spirit can visit us.

⁶¹ David Byrne, *How Music Works* (San Francisco: McSweeney’s, 2012), 16.

To explain this as concisely as possible, *tipêyimisowin* or freedom as defined from a Cree point-of-view also refers to being one's own boss, and therefore being in a state of self-control. As an independent artist, this has also been an important facet of my own *modus operandi*—an insistence upon self-expression and autonomy from any limiting or governing structure.⁶² My argument as to why these songs we are creating should be heard as freedom songs all comes down to the collective (and multiple individual) choices we have all made to participate in the workshop. Regardless of the rigour and commitment I impose, the resulting song becomes a manifestation of our collective self-determination—our liberated voice.

There is something undeniably powerful about the creation of a song. The song, as Véronique Audet explains “...evokes the existence of a power given to sound and transmitted through sound. This spiritual power brings personal, social, economic, and political power to the recipient, who becomes a guide and messenger.”⁶³ It is animate, a distinct entity and reflects the co-writers' self-awareness and existence.

⁶² In part, this is why I have not asked any correctional facility to pay for my workshop and why for most of my artistic career, I have worked at arms'-length from funders, usually with organizations that respect the rights of the artist.

⁶³ Veronique Audet, “Why Do the Innu Sing Popular Music? Reflections on Cultural Assertion and Identity Movements in Music,” in *Aboriginal Music in Contemporary Canada: Echoes and Exchanges*, Anna Hoefnagels and Beverley Diamond eds. (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012), 375.

The song we forge changes us all, if only seemingly temporarily at first. It is the evidence and manifestation of the collaborative design process—and so much more! Born of thought processes and heard on air—it is air. We toiled, exerted our will and through our meditative writing, we prayed and endured—and so the song is spirit. It has an emotional presence, is heart-felt and expresses our truth—our love of self; and the lyrics plus melody and the indisputable evidence of the resulting sound recording on CD prove—it is the body, in its physical form. As the song exists and is sung and/or listened to over and over, the impact deepens. The song becomes increasingly more and more useful, demonstrates to us multi-purpose and multiple-meaning—earning growing spiritual powers based on stories told afterwards from the creators, custodians and relatives. My friend Ahasiw suggests:

“We can look to the spirits of the natural world that we live among today for guidance in our survival as self-determined communities ... But to reach out and support each other, stories of and by these communities must be told and preserved, new art works made and seen, and our dynamic in this great storm described in every way possible.”⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Ahasiw Maskegon Iskwew, “Hysterical, Auto-Cannibalistic Culture,” in *The Multiple and Mutable Subject*, Vera Lemeche and Reva Stone eds. (St. Norbert: St. Norbert Art Centre, 2001), 33.

The Hole In The Moccasin: Letting Spirit Move Through⁶⁵

Within the scope of my project as it has developed, I must admit, that there has at times been some element of disorganization, long lists of unfinished business, huge lags and delays in product delivery, miscommunication and many missed opportunities in areas ranging from promotion, dissemination and sales of the songs, to the gaining of access to other facilities. Due to the ever-changing and generative nature of the project, I acknowledge my reluctance in assuming the burgeoning administrative load—not wanting to allow this project to overtake my life and creative practice. I also made errors in how I interpreted directives from CSC staff that impacted on various aspects of production and post-production. I also went through my own huge learning curves during the process of this MRP (professionally, personally, spiritually and emotionally) and can report that while some collegial working relationships suffered and ended as my time and commitment levels shifted, still others were germinated in their place. In all, the process transformed me in many ways, as I was

⁶⁵ I can find no references either in print or online, but I need nonetheless to cite this idea, which was told to me many years ago: that a small hole or mistake in design would be placed in a pair of moccasins to let spirit pass through, as in the Persian proverb: “A Persian rug is perfectly imperfect, and precisely imprecise”: <http://www.beliefnet.com/columnists/projectconversion/2011/08/the-imperfect-stitch.html> (viewed March 2015)

engaged in the composing of some truly powerful songs with some extremely remarkable beings, sharing this unique experience in such unlikely places.

For a few of the participants, these recordings and their contribution of lyrics may become the only physical trace of their sonic presence in this 'time zone'; while for others it may be the only song they'll ever own. There are many profound meaningful anecdotes arising—too many to recount, but to mention a few might indicate the kinds of dynamic side effects the project has already begun to produce.

After the very first workshop, CBC Radio Saskatchewan expressed interest in doing a story on the project. They visited us on the final day to record us singing the song, and then asked the participants (myself included) about the experience. When the story aired, every unit at the correctional centre had the radio tuned to CBC, and when 'Pine Grove' was named, everyone cheered—feeling acknowledged and on the map. A similar phenomena occurred again, when, a few years later, I had the opportunity to perform one of the songs written at Pine Grove on APTN.⁶⁶ Those who witnessed it tell me, that once again every unit

⁶⁶ The show, Hundred Years Café is produced and hosted by my cousin Gregory Coyes: <http://hundredyearscafe.com/> on Aboriginal Peoples' Television Network: <http://aptn.ca>

watched and listened, and when the name Pine Grove was uttered, it is said that everyone felt like they existed and mattered and had been acknowledged, through that act of naming.

One participant, nicknamed 'Baldy' was quoted to have said: "I've done some things in life, always looking for a quick fix. This is the first time in my life that I have felt so good about something. I've never felt that way before and I did it all without using drugs!"⁶⁷ She is said to have made this announcement in the week following the workshop in their regular literacy class; it is also said that the whole group shared in a good cry together with her. At the same facility, due to gang activities, the women had to be moved around periodically in order to ensure that no one from an enemy gang was sharing a cell or 'double-bunking' ⁶⁸ as this would result in a violent conflict. After the second workshop, word spread around the facility regarding who had written another song— the participants had begun to take pride in the songs, and in themselves as singers of their own songs. Two participants were identified in a unit just before the lights went out

⁶⁷ Excerpted from a letter written by Carla Johnson-Powell, teacher therapist at Pine Grove Correctional Centre, dated April 1, 2011.

⁶⁸ Double bunking is the practice of adding extra beds in a room only designed for one inmate, due to ever-increasing numbers of incarceration and overcrowding in CSC facilities. Howard Sapers, Annual Report, 2 and 13.

and were asked to sing. It is said that they sang the song over and over until the whole unit was asleep.

I was informed confidentially, during one of the workshops, that a particular participant—a participant who had seemed distant and preoccupied during the process but who carried on participating nonetheless—was on suicide watch.⁶⁹ After experiencing her own words sung, s/he became present and candid, and opened up to have a chat about what 'normal' life would be like during that time of year. I was informed that she was taken off suicide watch soon afterwards. Still, others have had negative reactions to the intensity, rigour, and exhilaration of self-expression involved in the creative process. One participant ended up in solitary confinement and another is said to have trashed their cell, resulting in punishment for this action. Yet so many others, and definitely the majority met each creative challenge eagerly—whether it was a writing, singing or rhythm exercise—and excelled!

⁶⁹ “Suicide watch is an intensive monitoring process used to ensure that an individual cannot commit suicide... Individuals are placed on suicide watch when it is believed that they exhibit warning signs indicating that they may be at risk of committing bodily harm or fatal self injury.” Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suicide_watch (viewed March 2015)

Another participant, who was a participant of the two first workshops at Pine Grove, was murdered shortly after her release, and a recording of her voice singing her two songs, along with the lyrics she contributed was sent to her family.⁷⁰ Though the cause of her death was unrelated to the workshop, the artefact of her recorded voice and the legacy of her contribution to this canon of songs will surely be of consequence to her family and the community she leaves behind.

Personally and professionally, my steepest learning curve has been in my expanding knowledge of how to manoeuvre an ethical path in the music industry as a songwriter, recording artist, music publisher and producer. I definitely made many mistakes, at times was ill advised, unprepared, gullible and possibly even negligent—though I learned many valuable lessons from every circumstance and encounter. In the end, I learned to respect and rightfully own the intellectual property of the workshop concept, methodology and outcomes.

In the future as this catalogue grows, I might appoint former co-writers as directors of a music-publishing corporation dedicated to these songs, or perhaps explore the possibility of a trust fund. I also need to

⁷⁰ Margaret Sewap - my MRP is dedicated to her memory. I will also send her family a copy of my MRP report.

address different ways to publicize and disseminate the songs—and to attract other singers to ‘cover’ this material in order to continue to raise awareness about ‘all our relations’ behinds bars, whilst also earning more income for the songwriters.

As mentioned, due to the burgeoning nature of the project, many publishing documents, namely the ‘song split’ document was not introduced until a few workshops into the project. Due to the itinerant lifestyles of many of the participants, getting this signed and returned to me continues to this day to add to the bespoke ‘to-do’ lists the seemingly never-ending administrative load. Where possible and ‘warranted’⁷¹, I provide everyone with my contact information and let participants know that they can call me ‘collect’, which in some cases means I’ve been vetted through their case workers and added to a few inmates ‘pin’ numbers.⁷² I’ve been elated to be able to keep in touch with a few from each workshop and I find myself constantly trolling Facebook and other social media to find others—so that I can send them what is theirs—the finished, mastered recordings, along with any residuals monies earned.

⁷¹ “CSC staff makes thousands of discretionary decisions each year.” For the purpose of my MRP, this translates to mean that no facility is managed exactly the same any other, which impacts directly on the kinds of documents and information I can share with inmates. Howard Sapers, Annual Report, 2.

⁷² In the federal institution I visited, inmates need to go through a process to apply to add people to their list of ‘telephone privileges’.

âniskohtâw (joining, continuing): 15 valued observations⁷³

I return to my original metaphor, the tipi—as it once again reveals more teachings from within its well-considered holistic construction. I provide this section of my report for future artists, writers, dancers and musicians who are interested in working with inmates behind bars. I hope in some way that these observations create a life-affirming structure within which you can house your own original contributions.

- Obedience: Pay close attention to and heed the instructions and rules provided by your contact/programs staff, as it may be their job and reputation on the line. If unsure, get clarification so that you can plan any resulting and necessary work-arounds due to these limitations well in advance.
- Respect: Always ensure that the programs staff involved in your visit are revered. They hold an important place in the hearts and minds of the inmates—from homeroom teacher to confidante to Elder. There are limitations as to how much information they can share about the inmates before, during and after your visit, and how much

⁷³ Joseph Naytowhow shared this with term with me when I read him these observations; in his words “You’re beckoning people to continue linking and using what you have learned in the same way that the poles of a tipi are linked and continue to provide shelter.”

communicating they can do with the inmates on your behalf, it is important not to abuse the access they provide.

- Humility: You will be constantly surprised at how much you can learn about yourself by spending time with the inmates. They will mirror your actions and attitudes back so quickly it will make your head spin. They taught me how to listen!
- Happiness: You will get back what you give, and so much more! I have personally never been so happy being creative with a group of people whom I had not previously met.
- Love: This is what it all comes down to! If you learn to open your eyes and ears (remember the previous codes of conduct), then your heart will forever be opened as well.
- Faith: Keep one foot in front of the other and stay focused on your end goal. If it is life-affirming and for the betterment of all, the spirit world will back you up.
- Kinship: I heard several different programs staff members talk about how they had strict boundaries set, in order to delineate questions of whether, and if so how, they could interact with inmates out in the world beyond the prison walls. Personally, I have set up a few ground rules myself such as: you can call me 'collect', but not in the middle of the night, and do not call drunk or stoned or demanding money. I would set the same boundaries for any of my blood relatives.

- Cleanliness: Have good boundaries, know yourself and your limits and do your spiritual cleansing regularly. Also, on a practical level—self-care supplies inside facilities are basic and many additional toiletries need to be purchased from the canteen, so if you are entering smelling of fragrant soaps and lotions, find out in advance if you can give out little gifts (samples work very well for this purpose).
- Gratitude: Again, you'll get back so much more than you can imagine, you'll be grateful for a long, long time. As Elder Art Solomon said "the sky's the absolute limit!" Let this influence your project to the very core.
- Compassion: The etymology of compassion is defined as 'to suffer with.' In Cree language the connotation is about sharing; I learned that by observing that participating in my workshop and the various aspects of it, were some of the only choices left to many inmates, they would opt out as a way of exercising their rights—even if on another level they might have wanted to take part. I was humbled, respectful and compassionate when I understood the depth and intent of their choice.
- Courage: do not try to 'fake' anything because the inmates will see right through any façade. Have the courage to be yourself.

- Good Child-Rearing: the creation you forge together will live on! Be a good co-parent and make your creative project a cradle filled with the best, most life-affirming potential you can imagine.
- Hope: stay optimistic and keep breathing together, even when the results you have as proof seem less than what you desired. Hidden gems, sheer brilliance and unexplainable alchemic reactions are one more deep breath away.
- Protection: if all the above values are adhered to (i.e. if you are honestly doing your best), then everyone involved in your project will 'have your back'.
- Freedom: remember, the demonstration of your ability and willingness to express yourself can have a life-long influence and be the very key to opening a door for someone else.

wayinohtêw (S/he returns): Codas and Turnarounds⁷⁴

"The one brings to its song something of the wide expanse of the sky, the voice of the wind, the sound of waters; the other's song can only be the song of captivity, of the bars that limit freedom, and that pain that is in the heart. So it is with my spirit, which may try to soar, but falls again to the dullness of common things..."⁷⁵

⁷⁴ 'waynohtêw' is my ancestor's name. I use it here with respect and use the spelling from Arok Wolvengrey's print and online Cree Dictionary: <http://creedictionary.com>

⁷⁵ Edward Ahenakew, *Voices of the Plains Cree* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1995), 72.

At this point in my report, I must return to some originating questions: how could these lyrics and melodies infer freedom, and what kind of an Indigenous song sung in English and behind prison doors, still has spirit lifting it to the ether, to commune with nature and communicate to the creator? What I do know is how ingenious my ancestors were and the very word 'Cree' hints at this. A little sneak-up by way of a short history lesson is in order to contextualize this.

We know this francophonized misnomer is derived from the fact that the nêhiyawak (Cree people) were some of the first to trade with the mistahêy waskahikan iyiniwak (big house people – aka people who lived in forts). “The word Cree comes from the French word, Kristineaux, which is actually a mis-pronunciation of the [Anishnaabe] word, Kenistenoag. Kristineaux became shortened to Kri, spelled Cree in English.”⁷⁶ The Cree who lived and traded around the forts saw that there was much to be acquired from the newcomers.

Artist and academic Sherry Farrell Racette once shared a story with me about my ancestors, amisk waciya-waskahikan iyiniwak (beaver hills lodge people) where Fort Edmonton was situated. I will do my best to

⁷⁶ <http://www.wildernessclassroom.com/members/teachers/cree.pdf> (viewed March 2015)

tell the story in writing here—though it is much more entertaining and animate when told orally.

Because of the ongoing skirmishes, ‘sneak-ups’ and raiding parties with the Blackfoot Confederacy to the south, the nêhiyawak (Cree people) taught their horses to return home. Sherry tells me that this was particularly useful if the Blackfoot raided, because after a few days or weeks, the horses they had captured would simply make their way north, back to the Cree camp. Later, when European settlers started arriving en masse at the fort to set up homesteads, and were often in need of supplies—they naturally purchased horses from the Cree. After a few days, these horses would soon leave their new owners and return to the camp of their origin. The settlers, having heard about the tendency of the Blackfoot to raid, would then assume that it was in fact the Blackfoot who had stolen them.⁷⁷ A clever and ingenious enterprise!

In another ‘sneak-up’, a story once related to me was how the Cree were nicknamed ‘deceivers’ by the Ktunaxa people; the naming took place during spring break up, when the massive snow and buildups of

⁷⁷ From 1996 to roughly about 2000, I visited Sherry Farrell Racette’s home in Regina and purchased a few stories from her. Usually, I would trade her a nice blanket, tobacco and some money for a story. This short version of this particular story is one that she had saved as part of her ‘research bundle’ for her own PhD.

ice from winter were just starting to melt. A raiding party of Cree men crossed over a mountain pass in the Rocky Mountains into a Ktunaxa camp on the lower Kootenay Plains, again looking for horses, food—or women. Instead, they found a mostly empty camp with a few old people—and a few women—since many of the others band members were off hunting and gathering. They decided to kidnap a woman and as they re-entered the mountain pass the Cree realized that they would be too easily tracked so, with the Ktunaxa woman over their shoulders, they walked backwards using their same footprints, and were never followed.⁷⁸

My point in relaying these accounts is that Indigenous people have always been ingenious and adaptive; these ‘sneak-ups’ and raids trained young men about bravery, skillfulness and resourcefulness⁷⁹. Tlingit curator and critical writer Candice Hopkins suggests that this proclivity to adapt is: “...a continuation of what Aboriginal people have been doing from time

⁷⁸ Regrettably, I didn’t document the name of the Ktunaxa (aka Kootenai) woman who shared this story with me, but it was in 2004 in what is now known as Creston, BC. I am related to Kootenayoos and have long wondered how that word made it up to Lac La Biche, AB.

⁷⁹ Though I don’t have time to go into these stories, a couple books dealing with women’s resourcefulness can be found in my bibliography, most notably Janice Acoose’s book!

immemorial: making things our own.”⁸⁰ Why would it be different now with popular song forms and English lyrics?

Véronique Audet discusses the phenomenon of how the Innu people—of the land now known as northern Quebec, have successfully and naturally adopted these new song forms, proposing that: “Innu popular musicians and the music they create continue the historic borrowing and sharing that characterized earlier encounters; hence this music is inspired by ancient Innu traditions.”⁸¹ I would further suggest that these freedom songs sneak-up and operate, as Ahasiw Maskegon Iskwew instructs us to: “opportunistically mutate into new and more virulently resistant cultural infections at undetectable levels or in apparently benign camouflage—continually just below and beyond the cultural-DNA mapping surveillance.”⁸²

Leonard Cohen sings “there’s a crack in everything, that’s how the light gets in”⁸³ and anarchist poet Hakim Bey suggests that so many of us who work in the arts and cultural trenches have probably been there all along—next to our incarcerated kin in his poem *Chaos* “...Here we are crawling the cracks between walls of church state school & factory, all the

⁸⁰ Candice Hopkins, “Making Things Our Own: The Indigenous Aesthetic in Digital Storytelling,” in *Horizon Zero: Tell*, Volume 17, 2004.

<http://www.horizonzero.ca/textsite/tell.php?is=17&file=4&tlang=0>

⁸¹ Véronique Audet, *Why do the Innu Sing*, 375.

⁸² Ahasiw Maskegon Iskwew, *Hysterical, Auto-Cannibalistic*, 33.

⁸³ Leonard Cohen “Anthem,” from the album *The Future*, 1992.

paranoid monoliths. Cut off from the tribe by feral nostalgia we tunnel after lost words....”⁸⁴

So what better way to build hope and engender freedom for generations still to come, than to dig deep within Canada’s correctional institutions, to create and share words and songs penned by the inmates themselves? *Why The Caged Bird Sings* encourages enterprise and ingenuity by sharing copyright and ownership, and by revising standard practices in music publishing agreements. This is a metaphorical return to our old ways, and a gesture towards reinvigorating our gift economy, redistributing wealth. For me, it is my own demonstration of *nikwatisowin*—the communal act of sharing the meat of the kill. I believe that I did something truthful and life affirming by sharing my passion of creative expression—my own inviolable freedom—and will continue to do so in future workshop iterations and experiences with whoever wants to sing and play along.

⁸⁴ Hakim Bey, “Chaos,” in *T.A.Z: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1996), 4.

Indigenous Intervention #4: Thank the Spirits

It is my most honest and sincere hope that there is something here of use or of consolation to you, dear reader. I would have preferred to have had an envelope of cistêmaw (tobacco) added to the back of this book, but due to current library regulations and issues around ‘controlled substances’ this was not possible at the time of publication. Regardless, I ask you to find and use a pinch of this medicine—to go out on the land, or to a smudge, or a fire, and offer it, and as my mentor instructed me to do so long ago, “Do it for the healing of Mother Earth and all her beings.”

êkosi pitama (That is all for now).

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A.1 - The Beauty Within

©2008 SOCAN/Miyohakwan Music
Lyrics by: Tracey Gamble, Margaret
Sewap, Shelene Holcomb, Michelle
Marsh, Karen Moocheweines, Angela
Rabbitskin, Lisa Smith and Carla
Johnson-Powell
Music by: Cheryl L'Hirondelle

Verse 1:

Here's the chance to straighten out my life / not to go back to my old ways

Refrain:

The beauty within shall shine forever X2

Verse 2:

Though I've been used and abused / don't want to go down that road again

Refrain

The beauty within shall shine forever X2

Verse 3:

I need courage to trust again / to respect and love and forgive

Refrain

The beauty within shall shine forever X2

Verse 4:

How I'd love to be free / like an eagle soaring in the sky

Refrain

The beauty within shall shine forever X2

Verse 5:

Staying true to what you believe / cherishing what you love about life

Refrain

The beauty within shall shine forever X2

Verse 6:

I was love but now I am found / and got my feet back on the ground

Refrain

The beauty within shall shine forever X2

A.2 - The Journey Home

©2010 SOCAN/Miyohakwan Music
Lyrics by: Charli Thingelstad, Danielle
Ermine, Doris Banahene, Jane Paul,
Jeannine George, Margaret Sewap,
Stacy Gunnlaugson and Carla Johnson-
Powell
Music by: C. L'Hirondelle, G. Hoskins

Intro Chant:

wayya, heyya, wayya, hey-yo

X3

Verse 1

I am going down this road and I am going home
I need courage to lead my spirit there
People will try to ask me about the journey
But only with the potholes my sorrow I will share

Chant

way-ya, hey-ya, way-ya, hey-ya, way-ya, hey-ya, way-ya, hey-yo
hey-yo... (call and answer)

Verse 2

I am going down this road and I am going home
It's a fender-bender behind razor wire
Need to teach the children the right path to stay on
Give me love, faith and hope. Give me power!

Chant

way-ya, hey-ya, way-ya, hey-ya, way-ya, hey-ya, way-ya, hey-yo
hey-yo... (call and answer)

X2

Bridge (call and response)

What will you leave behind?		I will leave my anger
What will you leave behind?		I will leave my fear
What will you leave behind?		I will leave my shame
What will you leave behind?		I will leave my guilt!

Chant

way-ya, hey-ya, way-ya, hey-ya, way-ya, hey-ya, way-ya, hey-yo
hey-yo... (call and answer and fade)

X3

A.3 - Come My Sisters, Come

©2010 SOCAN/Miyohotakwan Music

Lyrics by: Maureen Montgrand, Elizabeth
"Lizzie" Charles, Bernice Bighead, Deanna
Renee Desjarlais, Melody Bird, Angela
Rabbitskin, M. Henderson, Carla Johnson-
Powell.

Music by: C. L'Hirondelle and G. Hoskins

Verse 1 (call and refrain)

I was someone's daughter in my younger years	Come my sisters, come
The thunder is over, I'll cry no more tears	Come my sisters, come
I wanna to call a meeting and find our lost women	Come my sisters come
We've heard the ghost speak:	
<i>"though dead I'm still living"</i>	Come my sisters, come

Chant

*Wayya heyya hey, wayya heyya hey, wayya heyya hey, wayya heyya hey,
wayya heyya hey, wayya heyya hey ho*

Verse 2

How many times have I died in this life?	Come my sisters, come
We can live on, so don't drop your pride	Come my sisters, come
We'll rock, we'll rumble, we'll riot, we'll rave	Come my sisters, come
From P.A. to L.A. to Timber Bay	Come my sisters, come

Chant

Verse 3

To my friend who is my sister, my sister who is my friend	
	Come my sisters, come
We'll always stay true, we'll never pretend	Come my sisters, come
It's a grassroots movement where we all belong	Come my sisters, come
We'll stand beside each other and keep our spirits strong	
	Come my sisters, come

Chant

Spoken Word

Let your struggles become your survival tools. Let not your stolen
years rob us, nor tear us apart...

Chant

Outro (spoken)

Come my sisters come, come my sisters come...

A.4 - Lightning Scarred Heart

©2011 SOCAN/Miyohotakwan Music
Lyrics by: Jennifer Houle, Rosanna N.,
Celeste Whitehawk, Abby Nawakayas,
Bernice Bighead, Cheyanne Fox, Jessie
LaPlante Sandi, Carla Johnson-Powell
Music by: C. L'Hirondelle & G. Hoskins

Chant

sha-sha-sha-shy-ya / sha-sha-sha-shy-ya / sha-sha-sha-shy-ya / sha-sha-sha-sho

Verse 1

Lightning scarred heart
Tell me I'm beautiful
Your whispers are a hushed lullaby
Your soft smiles
Your bright ideas
Makes time go faster each day

Verse 2

Lightning scarred heart
I'll tell you you're beautiful
I was so lost when it was just me
Heavens, a million stars
Is how long I'll love you
You're all I ever wanted finally, oh finally

Bridge

Be strong out there
Hold me sometime
Kiss me, trust me
I'll let my walls down, oh

Reprise

Lightning scarred heart
Tell me I'm beautiful
In whispers - a hushed lullaby

Chant

Sha-sha-sha-shy-ya / sha-sha-sha-shy-ya / sha-sha-sha-shy-ya / sha-sha-sha-sho

A.5 - Here I Am (Bless My Mouth) ©2013 SOCAN/Miyohakwan Music
Lyrics by: Catherine McAlinden,
Christine Griffiths, Heike Irmgard
Hagen, Sherry Wright, Beverly
Fullerton, RM Gorman, Lori ann
Maurice, Kristen Dillon, Katie Brunet,
Tiffany Peters, E. Jackman, Panda Bear
Delorme, Vonetta Martin, and Cyndi
Sinclair.
Music by C L'Hirondelle/G Hoskins

Chant:

*way-ya-ya/hey-hey-way-ya-way-ya-way-yo/hiy-ya-way-ya-way-ya-way-yo/
hiy-ya-way-ya-way-ya-way-yo/hey-yo-hey-hey-hey-yo...*

Vox intro

Here I am (x4)

Chorus: (x2)

The healers have come, my spirit is free
The women are singing, bless my mouth

Verse 1

Do you step through the loopholes
Waiting for the exit
Or like me, resist them
Depend on permission
To set my words in motion

Chorus

Verse 2

Have mercy I'm a lover
I have a voice that trembles
I confess my love of love
In this place you are a stranger
I want so bad to be at ease

Chorus

Bridge: (Call & response)

Low love		here I am
Raspy truth		here I am
Strong message		here I am
Load roar!		

Chant

*way-ya-ya/hey-hey-way-ya-way-ya-way-yo/hiy-ya-way-ya-way-ya-way-yo/
hiy-ya-way-ya-way-ya-way-yo/hey-yo-hey-hey-hey-hey-yo...*

Verse 3

Pillow soft and comforting
Give me a taste of freedom
My dream is a window
All I need now
Is for you to be a door

Chorus**Verse 4**

I am not a bad person
I'm not a great one either
I never stopped trying
But I did stop praying
I wonder why I'm still here
It must be important!

Chorus**Chorus (repeat)**

(Substitute for last phrase)
Here I am!

Chant

*way-ya-ya/hey-hey-way-ya-way-ya-way-yo/hiy-ya-way-ya-way-ya-way-yo/
hiy-ya-way-ya-way-ya-way-yo/hey-yo-hey-hey-hey-hey-yo...*

A.6 - Can't Break Us

©2015 SOCAN / Miyohtakwan Music
Lyrics by Bannock Kid, Cruz, Ryder,
IWA, AWCP, Lil Durk, Redman, Lil
Bear, Key Lo G, Biter and E. Carrier
Music by C. L'Hirondelle & M. Schmidt

Intro (call and response)

I don't know		I don't know
I'm just messin' around		I'm just messin' around
I don't know		I don't know
I'm just holdin' it down		I'm just holdin' it down

Verse 1

Smile, accept your situation / you may be locked in a cell
But even if you're locked up / that won't stop you, you'll still rise!
So take a moment and close your eyes / learn to free your mind
and you will see you can have freedom all the time
you will see you can have freedom all the time

Chorus

They can love us / they can hate us
But they're never gonna break us
Don't let the little things bring you down

Verse 2

Yes, I am a mess / I'm so different from the rest
But go ahead put my smile to the test
I love you my fam and my team
I'm gonna take my happiness to the extreme
Never give up - your destiny could be your dream
- your destiny could be your dream

Bridge 1

They can take away my freedom / they can't take away my voice
They can't take away my happiness
that is my choice / that is my choice / that is my choice / that is my choice

Bridge 2 [free-style rap featuring Bannock Kid]

Verse 3

I can speak with honesty / and choose who I want to be
I can't change my course / it is something I must endorse
No-one knows my past and / they won't understand the wrong
They may say that I'm weak but I know I'm strong
They may say that I'm weak but I know I'm strong

Chorus

They can love us / they can hate us
But they're never gonna break us
Don't let the little things bring you down
Don't let the little things bring you down

Chorus 2

They can love us / they can hate us
But they're never gonna break us
Don't let the little things bring you down

Outro (X2)

I don't know		I don't know
I'm just messin' around		I'm just messin' around
I don't know		I don't know
Hold it down		Hold it down

B.1- MIYOHTAKWAN MUSIC SONGWRITER SPLIT LETTER

Date: _____

To Whom It May Concern:

This is to confirm that we are the sole writers of the song title:

(aka 'the composition') and hereby agree between and amongst ourselves to the following writers divisions:

Writer's names (print name):

1. _____ 10%
2. _____ 10%
3. _____ 10%
4. _____ 10%
5. _____ 10%
6. _____ 10%
7. _____ 10%
8. _____ 10%
9. _____ 10%
10. _____ 10%

Month/Year in which this title was completed: _____

Your signature below indicates you've read and are in agreement to the above and allow Miyotakwan Music (Cheryl L'Hirondelle) to operate as the publisher of the composition.

- | | |
|----|-----|
| 1. | 6. |
| 2. | 7. |
| 3. | 8. |
| 4. | 9. |
| 5. | 10. |
- 90

B.2 - MIYOHTAKWAN MUSIC SONG CREDIT INFORMATION

DATE: _____

SONG TITLE: _____

LOCATION: _____

LEGAL NAME: _____
(print)

HOW DO YOU WANT TO BE LISTED/CREDITED ON THE CD?
(i.e. First Name, Surname / First Name, Surname Initial only / First Name
Initial only, Surname / Initials only / Alias only / etc.)

HOW DO YOU WANT TO BE NAMED/CREDITED DURING PUBLIC
PERFORMANCES?
(options as per above choices)

By signing this document you agree to be listed (as you've indicated above)
as a co-songwriter in the song credits of the eventual single and album
release of this song:

as part of the larger *Why the Caged Bird Sings* project. I will also endeavour to
credit you (as per how you have indicated above) during any live
performances of the song.

Signature: _____

Witness: _____
(signature)

Witness Name: _____
(print)

This document is to certify that

co-wrote the song:

during the following date(s):

as part of the collaborative songwriting project

Why the Caged Bird Sings

Published by Miyohakwan Music

**and is entitled to an equal share in any licensing
residuals the song earns from this day forth.**

Signed: _____

On this date: _____

C.1 – MUSIC CREDITS

01 The Beauty Within

©2008 SOCAN / Miyohkwan Music

Written & recorded June 2-6, Pine Grove Correctional Centre, Prince Albert SK

Performed by: Tracey Gamble, Margaret Sewap, Shelene Holcomb, Michelle Marsh, Karen Moocheweines, Angela Rabbitskin, Lisa Smith, Carla Johnson-Powell, Cheryl L'Hirondelle

Recorded, mixed and mastered by: Barry Mihilewicz, Jason Moon - Big Drum Media (Prince Albert)

02 The Journey Home

©2010 SOCAN / Miyohkwan Music

Written & recorded March 22-26, Pine Grove Correctional Centre, Prince Albert SK

Performed by: vocals, hand percussion – Charli Thingelstad, Danielle Ermine, Doris Banahene, Jane Paul, Stacy Gunnlaugson, Jeannine George, Margaret Sewap, Carla Johnson-Powell, Cheryl L'Hirondelle; solo vocals - Charli Thingelstad; hand drum - Cheryl L'Hirondelle; guitars – Gregory Hoskins.

Recorded by: Gregory Hoskins (additional guitars recorded Toronto and Guelph)

Mixed and mastered by: David Travers-Smith – Found Sound Productions (Toronto)

03 Come My Sisters, Come

©2011 SOCAN / Miyohkwan Music

Written & recorded October 3-7, Pine Grove Correctional Centre, Prince Albert SK

Performed by: vocals – Maureen Montrand, Elizabeth Charles, Bernice Sanderson, Deanna Renee Desjarlais, Melody Bird, Angela Rabbitskin, M. Henderson, Carla Johnson-Powell, Cheryl L'Hirondelle; spoken word – Bernice Sanderson; percussion – Cheryl L'Hirondelle; guitars and drum programming – Gregory Hoskins, bass – Colleen Hodgson

Recorded by: Gregory Hoskins, (with additional recording, Toronto and Guelph)

Additional recording, instrumentation, mixed and mastered by: David Travers-Smith, Found Sound Productions (Toronto)

C.1 – MUSIC CREDITS continued

04 Lightning Scarred Heart ©2011 SOCAN / Miyohtakwan Music
Written & recorded November 21-25, 2011 Pine Grove Correctional Centre, Prince Albert, SK. Additional recording January 16, 2012, Pine Grove Correctional Centre, Prince Albert SK.

Performed by: site-specific percussion and vocals – Jennifer Houle, Abby Nawakayas, Celeste Whitehawk, Bernice Sanderson, Rosanna, Cheyanne Fox, Carla Johnson-Powell, Cheryl L'Hirondelle; rattles, trap percussion – Cheryl L'Hirondelle; guitars – Gregory Hoskins.

Instrumental bed tracks & Cheryl's vocals recorded by: Gregory Hoskins
Additional Participants' vocal performances recorded by: Harvey Knight
Mixed and mastered by: David Travers-Smith, Found Sound Productions (Toronto)

05 Here I Am (Bless My Mouth) ©2013 SOCAN / Miyohtakwan Music
Written April 15 – 19 at Okimaw Ohci Healing Lodge, Nekaneet First Nation, SK.

Performed by: lead vocals - Cheryl L'Hirondelle; backing vocals - Gregory Hoskins; percussions – Cheryl L'Hirondelle; guitars – Gregory Hoskins

Recorded and mixed by: Gregory Hoskins (Toronto and Guelph, ON)

[Note: recording is unmastered and participant voices yet to be added at a later date]

06 Can't Break Us ©2015 SOCAN / Miyohtakwan Music
Written and recorded March 12 – 18, Paul Dojack Youth Centre, Regina, SK.

Performed by: vocals - IWA, Bannock Kid, AWCP, Cruz, Redman; free-style rap – Bannock Kid [Note: above participant names are all aliases]; percussion – Cheryl L'Hirondelle; drum programming, guitar and bass – Mark Schmidt

Recorded, mixed and mastered by: Mark Schmidt, Northern Town Music Productions (Regina)

C.2 Music CD

NOTE:

Accompanying Material

The following accompanying material is available upon request from the OCAD University Library: [*Why the Caged Bird Sings* - 6 Song EP]. Anyone requesting the material may view it in the OCADU Library or pay to have it copied for personal use